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Where Is the “Mormon” in Mormon Studies?

Loyd Ericson

LAST YEAR AT CLAREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY, the Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association (CMSSA) hosted a conference focused around a rather self-referential question: “What is Mormon Studies?”¹ This, of course, seemed to be an odd (and belated) question to ask of a community who had been locally engaged in Mormon Studies for several years at this point. The Claremont LDS Council on Mormon Studies had been formed in 2002 and had already sponsored some conferences on Mormon Studies, the Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association officially took shape in 2007, and in 2008, Richard Bushman was hired as the first Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University. Having been in the process of doing Mormon Studies, we felt it valuable to step back and ask what it was that we were doing: What is this “Mormon Studies” that we felt we were actively engaged with?

1. “What Is Mormon Studies? Transdisciplinary Inquiries into an Emerging Field,” held at Claremont Graduate University, April 23–24, 2010. This introduction is a revision of my presentation at this conference.

With that in mind, where and what exactly is the “Mormon” in “Mormon Studies”? When we say that we are doing *Mormon Studies*, what do we mean? Is this “Mormon” descriptive or even prescriptive of the subject—the doer? Is there a type of methodology that is particular to *Mormon Studies*—the *doing*? Or is this descriptive of the object that is being studied—the *done*?

However, before asking where the “Mormon” in *Mormon Studies* is, we should perhaps briefly ask: What is the “Mormon” in *Mormon Studies*? While there has been some debate in the public sphere concerning who has ownership of the term “Mormon,” its use in *Mormon Studies* seems to nevertheless go well beyond the Salt Lake-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Because “Mormon” or “Mormonite” as a pejorative began in the very early stages of Joseph Smith’s prophetic career, the term “Mormon” could arguably be used to refer to any denomination resulting from Smith’s initial religious movement—regardless of whether or not they use the term self-referentially. In other words, because of shared aspects of history, theology, and geography, “Mormon” could be used in a much broader sense to include not only the LDS Church, but also the FLDS Church (who claim the term) and the Community of Christ (who do not), as well as other fundamentalist and restorationist movements.

Even with this broad understanding of what is denoted by the term “Mormon,” the question of what this term denotes in “*Mormon Studies*” still remains. Concerning the subject doing *Mormon Studies*, it seems clear already that those engaged in *Mormon studies* do not necessarily have to be a Mormon themselves. For example, our keynote speaker for our conference was Jan Shipps, a non-Mormon scholar who has been writing on Mormon history and culture for nearly half a century—longer than most Mormon-Mormon Studies scholars today. However, because of the challenging nature of academically studying religion, whether or not the person doing *Mormon Studies* is Mormon (and how she understands her relationship to Mormonism) is nevertheless a defining factor in what it means for them to be doing *Mormon Studies*, regardless of the quality of her work.

So who are these subjects? And how are they related to Mormonism? There seem to be at least six different groups that participants in *Mormon Studies* tend to be categorized into:

First, at one end of the spectrum is what I’ll call the pastoral Mormons, whose work and relationship to Mormonism is almost entirely theological and concerned with the evangelization of non-Mormons and indoctrination of already believing Mormons. Perhaps represented best

by Robert Millet, these are scholars whose writings are often testimonial and lie close to (if not beyond) the border of academia and pastoral theology. This is not to say that they are incapable of academic scholarship. In fact, because of the explicit statements of faith that they might make, they often provide a certain dimension of religiosity that is often left out of studies that are claiming to study that religion. Millet's recent projects with interfaith discussions are an example of a function that I believe is a valuable addition to Mormon Studies. However, because of the testimonial nature and evangelization that may be present in the pastoral Mormons, there is an understandable uneasiness with bringing them into academic discourse, as testimony sometimes has the tendency to inhibit, rather than encourage, discussion.

The second group of subjects is made up of the Mormon apologists. Like the previous group, apologists also make statements of faith explicit in their work. However, unlike the pastoral Mormons, the apologists' goal is to not just state their faith, but to defend or prove the truth claims of that faith, all the while attempting to do so within parameters of strict academic scholarship. This group is easily best represented by Daniel Peterson and his colleagues in the Maxwell Institute at Brigham Young University. As the Maxwell Institute's mission statement puts it, their primary mission includes "Describ[ing] and defend[ing] the Restoration through highest quality scholarship" and "Provid[ing] an anchor of faith in a sea of LDS Studies."² While they may at least seem to work within academic standards, there still exists an uneasiness among many about including them into Mormon Studies because of the belief of many academics that Mormon and/or religious studies is a forum for studying, and not promoting or defending, religious beliefs.

The third group of subjects doing Mormon Studies is perhaps best described as the "Mormon, but . . ." Used in sentences, this description usually comes in the form of: "She is a Mormon, but she is not an apologist." Or "He is a believing Mormon, but he doesn't let that affect his scholarship." Or "She is a Mormon, but she hides it well in her work." As the largest and broadest group within Mormon Studies today, this is perhaps best represented best by Claremont's own Richard Bushman. Those in this group might all subscribe to Mormonism, however, the extent to which they make their faith known in their work varies. Unlike the apologists, their work is usually to seek out a descriptive and academically

2. "Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship Mission Statement," Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/about/missionstatement.php> (accessed April 21, 2010).

accepted understanding of Mormonism that does not evangelize or offer apologies for religious beliefs. However, the “Mormon, but...” is often left to play a difficult balancing act. On one hand, their status as a Mormon may leave non-Mormons skeptical of their academic credibility; and on the other hand, their attempts to approach Mormonism academically may cause other Mormons to question their religious devotion.

The fourth group of subjects is similar to the previous group, but reflects a shift to the other side of the spectrum. These are the “non-Mormon, but...”: “She is a non-Mormon, but she isn’t anti-Mormon.” Or “He is a non-Mormon, but he has a real interest in objectively studying Mormonism.” Or “She is a non-Mormon, but she is not attempting to disprove Mormonism.” While this group may make up a relatively smaller portion of those doing Mormon Studies, their “non-Mormon, but...” status may at the same time elevate them in the Mormon Studies sphere, especially when the focus of their academic work is on Mormonism. This group is perhaps best represented by Jan Shipps and Douglas Davies. While the “non-Mormon, but...” may at first be met with a level of skepticism (or as Jan Shipps puts it, with the view of being “just another gentile”³), once they have proven the “but,” they are often paraded by Mormons inside and outside of academia—sometimes as if a non-Mormon with a non-critical interest in Mormonism validated the Mormon faith.

The fifth group along the spectrum is one that is often described as Mormon revisionists. This is clearly a loaded term that I am a bit hesitant to use as many who might fit within this group may not self-referentially use this term. While those in this group may or may not be believing Mormons, I have chosen to differentiate them from the “Mormon, but...” and “non-Mormon, but...” because of their tendency to focus on criticizing or revisioning traditional Mormon narratives. Perhaps represented best by Dan Vogel, Brent Metcalfe, and Michael Quinn, they frequently catch the ire of apologists because of perceived “attacks” on Mormon beliefs and historical claims. While usually grounded in strict academic methodologies, their (usually) explicit criticisms often push them to the borders of what is often included in Mormon Studies.

The final and sixth group of subjects potentially doing Mormon Studies is made up of the so-called “anti-Mormons.” This, again, is a very loaded term, and I use it to describe those whose stated purpose is not just to criticize traditional Mormon narratives, but to do so with the intent of getting Mormons to lose their belief in, and leave, Mormonism. This

3. Jan Shipps, Keynote address at “What Is Mormon Studies?” April 23, 2010.

group of subjects usually comes in either the form of counter-cultists like Jerald and Sandra Tanner whose research is done with the goal of encouraging Mormons to leave Mormonism and accept a more traditional understanding of Christianity, or could perhaps arise in a Mormon faction of the new-atheist movement whose central interest in research and argumentation might be to encourage Mormons to deny theism. While anti-Mormons may be instrumental in bringing forth important research in Mormon Studies, like their pastoral counterparts in the first group, the testimonial nature and evangelization in their work results in an understandable uneasiness with bringing them into academic discourse, as their stated agendas can also inhibit, rather than encourage, discussion.

Of course, these six broad groups of subjects are not the sum-all of those doing Mormon Studies, and I only bring them up to highlight the way in which the term “Mormon” is often used to describe and categorize those doing Mormon Studies. Further descriptive categories could include Mormon women, feminist Mormons, black Mormons, LGBT Mormons, cultural Mormons, Hispanic Mormons, former Mormons, antagonistic non-Mormons, and many others that may or may not properly describe the way they view themselves or their work—but which are nevertheless projected on them by others.

How each of these subjects are related to Mormonism also seems to be tied in the way that they approach their studies, showing that “Mormon” might also be descriptive of the method by which Mormon Studies is done. In his essay “Advice to Christian Philosophers,” Alvin Plantinga argued that “we who are Christians and propose to be philosophers must not rest content with being philosophers who happen, incidentally, to be Christians; we must strive to be Christian philosophers.”⁴ In response, D.Z. Phillips, in his “Advice to Philosophers who are Christians,” countered by saying, “in elucidating the surroundings in which belief in God is held fast, the philosopher is not doing something called Christian philosophy. He is simply doing philosophy.”⁵ For Plantinga, Christian philosophy is a type of philosophical inquiry which holds a priori certain Christian beliefs. For Phillips it is nonsense to talk of a unique Christian philosophy; rather, there is just philosophy. Anything beyond that, such as “Christian philosophy,” is simply descriptive of Christians using philosophical methodology to explore or argue about Christian beliefs.

4. Alvin Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philsophers,” *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1984): 271.

5. D.Z. Phillips, “Advice to Philosophers who are Christians,” in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 233.

Without getting too deep into the question of philosophy, this debate about whether one is engaged in Christian philosophy or is just a Christian philosophizing about Christianity leads to a similar question of whether or not there is a uniquely Mormon methodology in Mormon Studies. Like Plantinga we may want to talk of doing Mormon history, Mormon philosophy, Mormon sociology, Mormon anthropology, Mormon cultural studies, and so on. However, in doing so are we saying that there is a uniquely Mormon way of doing these things? Or are we *just* doing history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, etc.? Rather than saying that Mormon Studies is utilizing any uniquely Mormon methodology, it seems to be the case that instead Mormon Studies is *just* a Mormon (or a Mormon apologist, “Mormon, but”, “non-Mormon, but,” revisionist, or anti-Mormon) doing a particular study. Thus, for example, there is no Mormon history, there are just Mormons and others doing history.

While this understanding helps square Mormon Studies with the broader academic world, there still seems to be a uniquely Mormon methodology that one *could* use in Mormon Studies—though whether or not it ought to be included (or ought to be excluded) is a question still to be explored. This methodology would include a faith or religiously based testimonial as part of one’s argument or discussion. Examples of this might include appealing to one’s own spiritual confirmation of the historical reality of Joseph Smith’s First Vision when discussing the beginnings of Mormonism, basing an understanding of the context of the Book of Mormon off of one’s belief in its ancient origins, or the claim that the growth of the LDS Church is due to the Holy Spirit influencing others to convert to God’s true church. As I mentioned earlier, because testimonials may have a tendency to hinder, rather than encourage, discussion, both pastoral and anti-Mormons have largely been excluded from Mormon Studies events. Or when they have been allowed, it has usually been with the general understanding that they are invited *as such*, and not regardless of. For example, an LDS General Authority may be invited to speak with the understanding that he is speaking *as* a denominational representative, and not *as* a scholar.

As I just mentioned, the primary reasoning for excluding religious expressions (or testimonials) of faith has been based on the notion that because expressions of faith are religious and not academic in nature, they are metaphysical claims which cannot be verified and thus do not meet the academic criteria necessary for Mormon or general religious studies. It would, accordingly, be the same reason why religious beliefs about the origin of humans would not count as evidence in a conference on organic

evolution. Because the study of organic evolution is a scientific study, religious (or non-scientific) data should not be utilized.

There are perhaps two problems with this rationale. The first is that while it makes sense to say that religious beliefs should not be used to argue about scientific matter (such as organic evolution), there seems to be something peculiar about saying that statements of religious beliefs should not be appealed to when discussing religious phenomena. The second is that while religious beliefs are being rejected *a priori* because of their explicit metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, non-religious argumentation is being allowed even though they implicitly make similar, though opposing, assumptions. For example, when discussing the growth of the LDS Church, beliefs about the role of God are dismissed because of the explicit and unverifiable metaphysical assumptions concerning God and the Church. However, a sociological or psychological explanation of the Church's growth may be allowed even though it makes the implicit and unverifiable metaphysical assumption that the growth is *not* attributable to God. Similar problems arise when attempting to understand Joseph Smith's revelations, the Book of Mormon, or the role of God in the lives of believing Mormons. By excluding one explicit metaphysical claim while allowing another implicit metaphysical claim we are only veiling certain religious (or non-religious) prejudices.

It is for this reason that most institutions that do religious studies today choose to bracket out and avoid claims that either promote or criticize religious beliefs. For example, the website for the religious studies program at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill states that “the goal of any paper in religious studies should not be to demonstrate or refute provocative religious concepts, such as the existence of God, the idea of reincarnation, or the possibility of burning in hell. By nature, such issues are supernatural and/or metaphysical and thus not open to rational inquiry.”⁶ A policy such as this, however, still leaves open the question of apologetic and revisionist approaches that focus on religious beliefs that are much more open to rational inquiry—such as those studying the origin of Mormon scripture.

This brings us to the final way in which the term “Mormon” might describe Mormon Studies: as the object—or that which is being studied. At a first glance it may seem that “Mormon” must obviously at least describe that which is being studied. Mormon history is about studying the his-

6. “Religious Studies,” University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill Religious Studies Program, http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/religious_studies.html (accessed April 23, 2010).

tory of Mormonism; Mormon theology is about studying the theology of Mormons; Mormon sociology is a study of Mormons; etc. However, what about something that is explicitly non-Mormon? Can a Mormon writing on early nineteenth century religious America be considered Mormon Studies, even if her paper does not explicitly refer to Mormonism? Can or should a Mormon doing biblical criticism be thought of as doing Mormon Studies? What about Terryl Givens' recent book⁷—a Mormon writing about pre-existence, which clearly is a topic of interest to Mormons? Or what about what Richard Bushman argued for at the 2009 conference for the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology? He said,

Mormonism began with [the] announcement that the creeds were an abomination before God. Can we make something of that? My suggestion today is that in our enthusiasm for engagement, we not overlook the advantages of distance. Besides blending and amalgamating, we should occasionally stand apart and look at the world with a critical eye from a Mormon vantage point. Perhaps we should cultivate a Mormon hermeneutics of suspicion.

Where do we stand, for example, on the great cultural formations of our era in world history: science, democracy, and capitalism? Are we content to reap the benefits of each of these cultural systems, or should we critique them and even resist?⁸

According to Bushman, Mormons *ought* to be looking outside of Mormonism in their studies and offering cultural criticisms from within Mormonism. In doing so, must one mention Mormonism to be doing Mormon Studies? Must it be explicit, or even implicit? Or does the approach from Mormonism “Mormonify” the object even if it is unseen—in the same way that throwing paint in a lightless room changes the color of the walls?

In this inaugural issue of the *Claremont Journal of Mormon Studies*, we leave the questions of what Mormon Studies is and where the “Mormon” is located largely untouched. Instead, the aim of this journal is to make available the best and most innovative work by graduate students in Mormon Studies—whatever that may be. Nevertheless, the place that

7. Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

8. Richard L. Bushman, “On Being Ill at Ease in the World,” presented at the annual conference for the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology at Claremont Graduate University, May 23, 2009.

“Mormon” plays in Mormon Studies is an inevitable question as submissions are discussed in this journal and most other Mormon Studies conferences, events, lectures, classes, and publications. Its role in various places perhaps forces us to ask the questions of who should be allowed to participate, how should it be done, and what should be the objects of these studies. Should boundaries of exclusion be drawn? Or should all—including the evangelizing, the apologists, the revisionists, and the anti-Mormons—be allowed to mingle in the broadest field of Mormon Studies?

Or is my attempt to take “Mormon” and place it anywhere but in front of “Studies” already a confused mistake? Complicating the issue further, at the 2010 conference for the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology at Utah Valley University, we had two presenters throwing another wrench into this whole question. With David O’Connor from Notre Dame presenting on Christian art and Kevin Hart from the University of Virginia giving a phenomenological reading of the parable of the Prodigal Son, we had two non-Mormon subjects, using non-Mormon methods to explore non-Mormon objects. And yet, somehow, there we all were—doing Mormon Studies. ☈

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The Inspired Fictionalization of the 1835 United Firm Revelations

Christopher C. Smith

Introduction

THE “UNITED FIRM” SET UP IN KIRTLAND, OHIO IN 1832 was one of the very first efforts at Mormon communalism. The Firm was established and organized according to instructions given in a series of five revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith. The members of the Firm were a small cadre of top Church leaders who acted as stewards over the Church’s mercantile and printing establishments, and oversaw its humanitarian efforts to care for the poor. The members of the Firm were expected to keep only as much income as necessary for survival. The surplus of their income was to be consecrated to the Firm. If they followed these commandments, the revelations predicted that “in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly.” The Firm was essentially a halting first step toward a centralized planned economy and an egalitarian redistribution of wealth.

When the 1833 Book of Commandments was published, a decision was made not to publish the United Firm revelations. A note scrawled at the top of one revelation says, “not to be published at this time.” This

decision was apparently motivated by fear of what might happen if creditors got wind of the Firm. The Firm might be held liable for its members' debts, and *vice versa*.

When the 1835 D&C was prepared two years later, it was decided that the revelations would be published, but only if the nature of the Firm and the identities of its members could be concealed. The revelations were altered so that they appeared to be from the time of Enoch. Among other changes, Church leaders' identities were concealed by replacing their real names with ostensibly ancient, Adamic code names. The code names were retained in all LDS editions of the D&C until 1981, though in editions after 1876 the modern names were supplied in brackets. In the 1981 edition all but a few of the code names were removed entirely.¹ The few that remained were dropped from subsequent printings of the same edition, where D&C 82:11 appears in slightly different font due to the touch-up process.² The Community of Christ edition still retains the code names, albeit with explanatory section headers.

The recent publication of the original handwritten manuscripts for several of these revelations as part of the *Joseph Smith Papers* series sheds new light on the code names, making possible a reassessment of their history and significance. The manuscripts provide evidence as to the general timeframe of the substitutions, confirm Joseph Smith's complicity in their inclusion, and reveal with finality the meanings of the various code names. These discoveries place the substitution of the code names solidly in the context of Joseph Smith's most vigorous efforts to restore the ancient languages of the biblical patriarchs.

A more important finding from the new manuscript evidence is that the fictionalization of these revelations was more elaborate than the mere substitution of code names. Significant additions and deletions were made in order to give these revelations an authentically ancient veneer. This new evidence of a more extensive fictionalization process raises questions about the adequacy of the Church's attempts to remove the fictional elements. These efforts have assumed a one-to-one correspondence between modern names and the Adamic code names that is at best an oversimplification. The evidence for fictionalization also raises

1. This textual history is also outlined in David J. Whittaker, "Substituted Names Published in the Doctrine and Covenants," *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 (1983): 105–106.

2. The touch-up seems to have been done in 1983. The headers to Sections 78 and 82 still make reference to the code names in current printings, even though the names have been removed.

the theological question of “inspired fiction” and the possibility that the fictional elements in these revelations might be benign or even preferable to their original readings. Finally, the fictionalization of these texts is also a fascinating historical case study in Joseph Smith’s tendency to blend practical and mystical concerns. The changes to the revelations were a way of keeping an important secret from outsiders, but they also represented a sort of mystical fusion of the modern Mormon community with the ancient city of Enoch.

The Substitution of Code Names and the Manuscript Evidence

The sections of the 1835 D&C that contained code names were 75, 86, 93, 96, and 98 (or, according to modern numbering, 78, 82, 92, 96, and 104). The code names were not part of the original revealed text for these revelations. In the manuscripts for 75 and 96, specific code names were added above the names of nineteenth century persons for which they were to be substituted. Longer portions of text to be changed in 75 were enclosed in brackets and assigned numbers. A pinhole through the manuscript page indicates that a slip was once attached with changes keyed to the numbers. In 96 an attached slip is still extant, and provides a header that contains the names “Enoch” and “Shinehah.”³ In the manuscripts for 93 and 98, the words to be replaced were identified by supralinear numbers. There is again a pinhole through the page of 93, where code names keyed to the numbers were attached. The manuscript for 98 has no pinhole, but this may be because the sheer number of names to be replaced necessitated a full-page insert.⁴ In the manuscript for 86, the word “firm” is twice replaced with “order”. The other code names of the 1835 printing do not appear on the manuscript, but supralinear asterisks bracket the text to be modified, and again a pinhole indicates that the changes were pinned to the page.⁵

The notations in the manuscripts appear in three separate hands. The

3. Revelation Book 1, p. 145 and Revelation Book 2, p. 60–61 and insert, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, edited by Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, vol. 1 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, eds. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 266–67, 532–37.

4. Revelation Book 1, pp. 192–98 and Revelation Book 2, p. 55, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 360–73, 522–23.

5. Revelation Book 1, pp. 128–29, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 228–31.

names inserted in 75 were written by W. W. Phelps. In 86 and 96 they were written by Oliver Cowdery. The numbers in 93 are in the hand of Joseph Smith, and in 98 the numbering was begun by Phelps and then continued by Smith.⁶ The presence of Smith's handwriting among these notations demonstrates that he was at least willingly complicit in the additions, if not their mastermind. Perhaps Smith wrote the numbers in the original manuscripts while dictating the replacement names to a scribe, writing on a separate slip to be attached.

The exact dates on which the revisions were made are unknown. The changes to Sections 75 and 86 could theoretically have been made between April 1832 and July 1833, when Revelation Book 1 was in Missouri being edited for publication in the Book of Commandments.⁷ This seems unlikely, however, since these revelations were not versified or otherwise edited for the Book of Commandments. The decision had in fact been made not to publish 86 at that time,⁸ and the editorial process seems not to have progressed as far as 75 prior to the destruction of the printing press in July 1833. Phelps's insertion of "Ahman" in Section 75 in the same ink as the code names is a further indication that these changes were made in 1835, since the spelling follows that of the 1835 "specimen of some of the pure language" rather than that of the 1832 "Sample of pure Language" that immediately preceded 75 in the Revelation Book.⁹

The changes to Sections 93 and 96, which appear in the handwriting of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, could theoretically have been made as early as the spring of 1834, when these men were appointed to a committee to publish the 1835 D&C. This too is unlikely, however, because changes made by Cowdery to Section 86 and by Phelps and Smith to 75 and 98 cannot have been made until Phelps and Revelation Book 1 arrived in Kirtland on May 17, 1835. Probably all five revelations were altered within a few days or weeks of each other.¹⁰

6. See handwriting annotations in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 228–31, 266–67, 360–73, 522–23, 532–37.

7. "Historical Introduction" to Revelation Book 1, in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 5.

8. Revelation Book 1, pp. 128, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 228–29.

9. Revelation Book 1, pp. 144–46, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 264–69; W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835, Vault MS 810, Box 2, Folder 1 in the W. W. Phelps Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

10. "Historical Introduction" to Revelation Book 2, in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 410; Bruce M. Westergen, *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John*

Not until Phelps's arrival did work on the D&C begin in earnest. The “Six first forms” (48 leaves or 96 pages) of the D&C were printed by May 26,¹¹ and printing proceeded rapidly until its completion sometime around August 17.¹² The revelations containing code names appear near the end of the printed book, so the changes could theoretically have been made as late as early August. A date in May or June seems more likely, however. Certainly Phelps and Smith seem to have been reading the “Sample of pure Language” on or before May 26, when Phelps copied an expanded “specimen of some of the pure language” into a letter to his wife.¹³ The “Sample” immediately preceded Section 75 in Revelation Book 1. The emendations to 75 are in Phelps’s handwriting and include the word “Ahman” from the “specimen”. Perhaps the idea to substitute fictitious names in these revelations was first conceived in order to address the concerns implied by John Whitmer’s scrawled note at the top of the Section 75 manuscript: “Not to be published now.”¹⁴

In the 1844 D&C, Sections 101 and 102 (103 and 105 according to modern numbering) were printed for the first time, with the Hebrew phrases Baurak Ale and Baneemy substituted for Joseph Smith and “mine elders,” respectively.¹⁵ Although these phrases have sometimes been included in studies of the 1835 code names, and certainly are illustrative of the same interest in ancient languages, they are not properly part of the same phenomenon. There was no thoroughgoing attempt to fictionalize these

Whitmer (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 167.

11. W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835. According to William Savage, *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1841), 236, a “form” in this context refers to “the pages [of set type] when they are imposed and locked up in a chase.” *Joseph Smith Papers* editor Robin Jensen informs me that “the 1835 D&C was printed using a work and turn method, meaning that one form contained the entire typeset pages for the entire gathering.” Each gathering of the 1835 D&C consisted of “eight leaves or sixteen pages. Thus they were just getting into part 2 of the 1835 D&C by May 26.” Robin Jensen to Christopher C. Smith, August 9–10, 2010.

12. Willard Richards, History of the Church, (CR 100 102), Manuscript B-1, as published in *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), disc 1.

13. W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835.

14. Revelation Book 1, p. 128, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 228–29.

15. For the Hebrew derivation of these phrases, see Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue* 3, no. 2 (1968): 49.

revelations or to mask the identities of Church leaders named therein. The use of Hebrew phrases in these two sections appears to be simple linguistic showmanship. The substitution of these phrases was done at a later time than the 1835 substitutions—probably at or around the time of the revelations' first printing in 1844.¹⁶

The Derivation of the Code Names and the Quest for the Pure Language

The identities of the persons and institutions whose names were encoded in 1835 have long been known from various early Mormon and anti-Mormon reminiscences.¹⁷ The publication of the original manuscripts largely confirms these previously-known identities, given in Figure 1.¹⁸

Some interesting hypotheses have been advanced to explain the derivation of these names. One early theory came from the pen of David J. Whittaker, who had discovered a document in the LDS Church archives in which W. W. Phelps suggested Hebrew translations for each name. This led Whittaker to conclude that the names were derived from “the Hebrew studies of early Mormon leaders.”¹⁹ The Kirtland study of Hebrew, however, did not begin in earnest until 1836, and Phelps also was not consistent in the meanings he assigned to each name.²⁰ Probably Phelps’s etymologies were post hoc formulations, not unlike the fanciful etymology he provided for the word “Mormon” in 1843.²¹ When Jewish scholar Louis C. Zucker examined the 1835 code names in conjunction

16. The substitutions are in no way anticipated by the manuscripts of these revelations in Revelation Books 1 and 2. Joseph Smith and his associates, moreover, did not study Hebrew in earnest until 1836. See Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” 43–47.

17. W. W. Phelps, “Explanation, &c.,” ca. 1863, MS d 1234, Box 41, Folder 4 in the Brigham Young Collection, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Orson Pratt, “Explanation of Substituted names in the Covenants,” *The Seer* 2, no. 3 (March 1854): 227–29; William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (Ohio: self-published, 1837), 13.

18. This chart is largely comparable, for example, to Whittaker, “Substituted Names,” 111.

19. Phelps, “Explanation, &c.,” ca. 1863; Whittaker, “Substituted Names,” 112.

20. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” 43–47; Whittaker, “Substituted Names,” 111fn.

21. Samuel M. Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (2008): 42.

PSEUDONYM	SECTIONS IN 1835 ED.	1981 ED. NUMBERING	ACTUAL MEANING
Ahashdah	75, 86, 96, 98	78, 82, 96, 104	Newel K. Whitney
Alam	86	82	Edward Partridge
Cainhannoch	98	104	New York
Enoch	75, 86, 93, 96, 98	78, 82, 92, 96, 104	Joseph Smith, Jr.
Gazelam	75, 86, 98	78, 82, 104	Joseph Smith, Jr.
Horah	86	82	John Whitmer
Lane-shine- house	98	104	printing office
Mahalaleel	86	82	A. Sidney Gilbert
Mahemson	86, 98	82, 104	Martin Harris
Olihah	86, 98	82, 104	Oliver Cowdery
Ozondah	98	104	store
Pelagoram	75, 86, 98	78, 82, 104	Sidney Rigdon
Shalemanasseh	86	82	William W. Phelps
Shederlaomach	93, 98	92, 104	Frederick G. Williams
Shinehah	86, 96, 98	82, 96, 104	Kirtland
Shinelah	98	104	print
Shine-lane	98	104	printing
Shule	98	104	ashery
Tahhanes	98	104	tannery
Zombre	96, 98	96, 104	John Johnson

FIGURE 1.

PSEUDONYM	SIMILAR BIBLICAL NAMES
Ahashdah	Ashdod
Alam	Alammelech, Elam
Cainhannoch	Cain, Hanoch
Enoch	Enoch
Horah	Hirah, Korah
Mahalaleel	Mahalaleel
Mahemson	Mahanaim
Pelagoram	Peleg
Shalemanasseh	Shalmaneser, Manasseh
Shederlaomach	Chedorlaomer
Shinehah, Shinelah, Shinelane	Shinar, Shimeah, Shiloh
Tahhanes	Tahan, Tahapenes

FIGURE 2.

with Joseph Smith's Hebrew textbooks, he concluded that they definitely were not dependent on a knowledge of Hebrew.²²

Zucker's counterproposal was that some of the names were adapted from the Bible. He identified several strong biblical parallels to a few of the code names. Others, however, he conceded were "hardly biblical in sound."²³ Zucker's case for a biblical derivation for some of these names could actually be pressed further than he pressed it. Figure 2 suggests a number of biblical names from which the code names may have been derived, including a few first proposed by Zucker.

It is probably no coincidence that most of the parallel biblical names are found in the primeval and patriarchal narratives of Genesis. In addition to these biblical parallels, a few of the names are similar to Adamic

22. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," 49.

23. Ibid.

words from prior revelations of Joseph Smith. Olihah, for example, may have been derived from the word olaah in the “specimen of some of the ‘pure language.’”²⁴ Zombre resembles the word Zomar, which Smith had claimed was “the original word for Zion.”²⁵ Gazelam was almost certainly the Gazelem of Alma 37:23, and Shule was borrowed directly from Ether 1:30. Significantly, these both seem to have been Jaredite (and therefore Adamic) words, uncorrupted by the confusion of Babel (Eth. 1:35).

These similarities to previously-revealed Adamic words suggest that the code names should be understood in the context of Joseph Smith’s efforts to restore primordial language.²⁶ Zucker intuited this when he wrote that “All this assorted invention might spring from the exercise of the restored gift of tongues and a related taste for the ‘pure Adamic language.’”²⁷ Indeed, the period during which the code names were substituted happens also to have been the period during which the “specimen of some of the ‘pure language’” and most of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar materials were produced. The primary participants in those projects—Smith, Phelps, and Cowdery—were exactly the same persons in whose handwriting we find the D&C substitutions.²⁸

Whatever the source materials that may have catalyzed the revelatory process, the relationship of the code names to the restoration of primordial language implies that they were intended as inspired productions

24. W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835.

25. Ezra Booth, “Mormonism – No. VI,” *Ohio Star* 2, no. 46 (Nov 17, 1831). See also Grammar and A[ll]phabet of the Egyptian Language, p. 23, as published in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers* (Cullman, Ala.: Printing Service, 1981), 49–50.

26. For an informative recent treatment of these efforts, see Samuel M. Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden,” *Church History* 78, no. 1 (2009): 26–65.

27. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” 49.

28. The specimen first appeared in a letter dated May 26, 1835, and was subsequently incorporated into the “Egyptian Alphabet”. The better part of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar materials were produced in July, 1835. It should also be noted that some of the code names have a vague similarity to the names of the persons they denoted. Thus Oliver Cowdery was Olihah, Martin Harris was Mahemson, and the tannery was Tahhanes. This observation lends support to my suggestion in a previous publication that the pseudo-Egyptian words Oliblish and Waine in the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar may have been intended to suggest the names of Oliver Cowdery and William Wines Phelps. See Christopher C. Smith, “The Dependence of Abraham 1:1–3 on the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 29 (2009): 39–47.

rather than merely fanciful creations. Certainly Orson Pratt, although he referred to the code names as “fictitious,” felt that Joseph Smith had been “dictated by the Holy Ghost to make these substitutions.”²⁹ Phelps, too, implied that the names were to be thought of as ancient and meaningful when he formulated his suggested interpretations of them.³⁰ A further indication of the seriousness with which the code names were to be taken is the fact that Shinehah, which debuted in Mormon parlance as a code name, was used in later revelations as a legitimate ancient word (D&C 117:8; Abr. 3:13).³¹ To the extent that these names were both authentically inspired and misleadingly applied, we can reasonably classify them as “inspired fictionalization”. We might even say “inspired historical fictionalization,” since the setting and perhaps also the characters of the fictionalized revelations were assumed to be historical even though the text itself was of modern origin.

Evidence of a More Thoroughgoing Fictionalization

The Adamic names were not the only substitutions made in the United Firm revelations. Modern terminology not appropriate to an Adamic context was generally replaced with more neutral or ancient vocabulary. Thus, for example, the “firm” became the “order.”³² “Farms” became “inheritances.”³³ The “Laws of the Land” became the “laws of the Lord.”³⁴ “Dollars” became “talents.”³⁵ In one instance the word “business” was re-

29. Pratt, “Explanation of Substituted Names,” 228.

30. Phelps, “Explanation, &c.,” ca. 1863.

31. William V. Smith has suggested that Shinehah was borrowed from Abr. 3:13, but the use of Hebrew in Abr. 3 and the chapter’s absence from Kirtland-era manuscripts militate strongly against its having been translated before the completion of the D&C’s printing in August, 1835. See William V. Smith, *A Joseph Smith Commentary on the Book of Abraham: An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Abraham*, 3rd ed. (Book of Abraham Project, 2009), 100, available from <http://www.boap.org>.

32. See D&C 75:1; 92:1; 98:1–3, 6–7, 9, 11–12 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 129, 145, 192–98 and Revelation Book 2, p. 55, 61 as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 230–31, 266–67, 360–73, 522–23, 536–37.

33. See D&C 98:8 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 194–95, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 364–67.

34. See D&C 86:4 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 129, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 230–31.

35. Presumably this term was borrowed from the Greek monetary system of the New Testament (see Matt. 25:14–30), although that system was still anach-

placed with “purpose,” and in another “printing” became “proclaiming.”³⁶ One reference to “the literary and Mercantile concerns” was supplanted by “the affairs of the poor.”³⁷ Clearly the intention was for these revelations to sound believably ancient to outsiders.

Because the twentieth-century Church’s attempt to restore the original text of these revelations has assumed a simple substitution of Adamic code names for the names of modern persons and institutions, more mundane substitutions like the ones just mentioned are still reflected in the present LDS text. In most cases these do not seriously alter the meaning of the text, especially for modern devotional readers far removed from the logistics of Kirtland’s United Firm. Perhaps the most significant of the changes is the reading “laws of the Lord” for “Laws of the Land” in 82:15 of the current edition, which not only communicates a different idea but also renders the following verse (“Behold, here is wisdom also in me for your good”) slightly redundant.

Perhaps more interesting than the changes made to modern terminology is the replacement of anachronistic Bible references with words and names more appropriate to an Adamic context. Thus, for example, Israel in one revelation was supplanted by Zion.³⁸ Where John Johnson had been told that he was descended from Joseph of Egypt, his Adamic counterpart Zombre was identified as a descendant of Seth.³⁹ A reference to Dives, the rich man of the New Testament parable of Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), was replaced with a more generic reference to “the wicked.”⁴⁰ An anticipation of the imminent Second Coming was changed to refer to the incarnation.⁴¹ Even the name of Jesus Christ was supplanted by its Adamic equivalent, Son Ahman.⁴² The reference to Joseph of Egypt has

ronistic for a revelation set in the time of Enoch. See D&C 98:12 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 197, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 370–71.

36. Revelation Book 1, p. 193–94, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 362–65.

37. See D&C 86:4 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 128, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 228–29.

38. Revelation Book 1, p. 146, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 268–69.

39. Revelation Book 2, p. 61, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 536–37.

40. See D&C 98:2 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 193, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 362–63.

41. See D&C 98:10 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 196, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 368–69.

42. Revelation Book 1, p. 146, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*,

been restored in the current LDS edition (96:7), but the other substitutions still stand in the present text.

More significant even than these heretofore-unnoticed substitutions are a few longer additions and deletions designed to deal with more substantial anachronisms. A lengthy set of instructions to safeguard the copyrights of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Bible translation, for example, was omitted entirely from the printed text.⁴³ Another revelation referred to the need for “an organization of the literary and <the> Mercantile establishments of my Church both in this place and in the Land of Zion.”⁴⁴ In the 1835 D&C this became a need for “an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place and in the land of Zion, or in other words, the city of Enoch” (75:1). The most interesting addition here is perhaps the clarification that Zion is “the city of Enoch.” To substitute Joseph Smith, Jr. for Enoch would make no sense of the added text, since Joseph lived in Kirtland, not Zion (i.e. Jackson County, Missouri). This is probably why the current D&C omits this phrase altogether. With no modern correlate, its sole purpose appears to be to clarify the ancient setting of the fictionalized text.

The most fascinating revisions of all are a few additions to these revelations that do not actually replace any text in the original. One such insertion provided the introductory clause, “The Lord spoke unto Enoch, saying”—a clause whose sole effect was to create the appearance of antiquity.⁴⁵ An even more interesting addition occurred in D&C 75:3 (1835 ed.). Here the Lord is said to have “established the foundations of Adam-ondi-Ahman” and “appointed Michael, your prince, and established his feet, and set him upon high; and given unto him the keys of salvation under the counsel and direction of the Holy One, who is without beginning of days or end of life.”⁴⁶ This addition, which is still retained in current editions of the D&C, was probably meant to be read quite literally and in

268–69.

43. The acquisition of copyrights for the Doctrine and Covenants and Bible translation were merely anticipated, not already accomplished. See D&C 98 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 196, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 368–69.

44. Revelation Book 1, p. 145–6, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 266–69.

45. See D&C 75:1 (1835 ed.); Revelation Book 1, p. 145, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 266–67.

46. See Revelation Book 1, p. 146, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 268–69.

the present tense. Adam/Michael was literally the prince and priest of Adam-ondi-Ahman in the ancient world in which the revised revelation was ostensibly set. Yet at the same time, the addition also spoke powerfully to modern Saints who were building their modern Zion near the site of Adam-ondi-Ahman, in anticipation of Michael's glorious return there in the latter days. Here we have an example of an element introduced partly for the purpose of maintaining the fiction, but partly also because of its powerful resonances and positive spiritual value in the present context.

The headings to the various revelations comprise a final set of additions. The headings were not part of the revelations' original text, and do not appear to have been designed with a one-to-one code word correspondence in mind. The most significant for our purposes is the header to Section 96, which read, "A Revelation to Enoch, showing the order of the city or stake of Zion, Shinehah, given for a sample to the saints in Kirtland, June, 1833."⁴⁷ A simple substitution of Joseph Smith for Enoch and Kirtland for Shinehah here would lead to an obvious redundancy (alleviated in the current edition by breaking the header into two separate sentences.) Rather, the message the header intends to communicate is that the Saints should model their present society and conduct on the ancient order of Enoch. Even though the instructions to Enoch are a sort of historical fiction, they are still ethically binding for the modern context. The result is that the fiction functions for the community in precisely the same way that the original, literal revelation had.

Instrumental Mysticism

Anti-Mormon writers who encountered the 1835 code names often found in them a source of amusement. Early twentieth-century critic I. Woodbridge Riley, for example, quoted the code names as evidence that "the fancy of the Latter-day prophet was as weird as the mad dean's Kingdom of Laputa."⁴⁸ An anonymous editorialist in the Warsaw Signal parodied the prophet's inspired translations by providing his own rather bizarre interpretations for the names. He confidently asserted that "Gazelem" means "Presiding Great Devil," "Pilagoram" means "Superior Ugly Devil," and "Nauvoo" is "strictly a reformed Egyptian word; and

47. Revelation Book 2, insert, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 534–35.

48. I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1903), 311.

being handed down according to our manner of speech, signifies, place where Devils delight to dwell.”⁴⁹

Early twentieth-century scholar George Arbaugh proffered a less colorful, but more perceptive interpretation. “Smith justified such names,” Arbaugh hypothesized, “on the ground that Gentiles should be kept in darkness.”⁵⁰ Arbaugh’s somewhat negative slant notwithstanding, his interpretation was not far from the truth. When William S. West visited Kirtland in 1837, he found his amusement not in the names themselves, but in watching Mormons squirm when he caught them fibbing about the names’ true meanings. One person he confronted told him “to learn things of less importance before [he] sought into such deep matters.” Another averred that the secret of the names’ meanings was “not to be made known to the world.”⁵¹ This language suggests that early Mormons viewed the code names as a spiritual mystery rather than a secret kept for purely financial reasons. Theirs was the language of religious esotericism rather than debt-evasion.

This however does not mean that financial motives were wholly absent—only that they were legitimized or subsumed by religious ones. Religiously sanctioned secrecy had been a part of Mormonism from the outset, with practical concerns often playing a role. One of the very first instructions Joseph Smith was given when the angel informed him of the existence of the golden plates was to “be careful not to proclaim these things or to mention them abroad.” The rationale was that if the world found out about the gold, they might try to kill him for it.⁵² After the loss of the 116 pages, a revelation instructed him not to show his translation to the world until it was finished, in order “that you may be preserved.”⁵³ Shortly after the publication of the Book of Mormon, Smith revealed to Martin Harris that the scriptures had used misleading language about the eternity of hell in order to motivate moral behavior. Although Harris had the spiritual maturity to handle such knowledge, he was not to pro-

49. “A Translation,” *Warsaw Signal* 2, no. 11 (July 21, 1841).

50. George Bartholomew Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism: Its Character and Changing Forms* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), 99fn.

51. West, *A Few Interesting Facts*, 13–14.

52. Lucy Mack Smith, Preliminary Manuscript, p. 41, as published in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 294.

53. *A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Independence, MO: W. W. Phelps, 1833), 9:7–8; hereafter BC.

claim it to the world “lest they perish.”⁵⁴ Although the reasons for secrecy were often quite practical and concrete, as in the above cases, the revelations frequently also framed them in mystical terms. The Saints were to “keep the mysteries of the Kingdom unto [themselves], for it is not given to the World to know the mysteries.”⁵⁵

The need for discretion intensified with the introduction of the practice of polygamy, which had the potential to provoke violent opposition. An ancient precedent for secrecy was provided in the Book of Abraham, where Abraham and Sarai are explicitly commanded by God to mislead Pharaoh about their marital relations.⁵⁶ The grisly penalties of the endowment ceremony ritually underscored what was at stake in guarding this mystery.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the consequences of indiscretion were even more graphically illustrated by the martyrdom of the prophet in 1844.

The blurring of the line between the practical and the mystical is particularly evident in the appeal to divine “wisdom” to justify instructions that skirted the edges of standard moral and legal conventions. It was “wisdom” that Sidney Gilbert obtain a license to trade with the Indians, so that the gospel could be smuggled to them despite the Mormons’ failure to obtain permits for missionary work.⁵⁸ It was “wisdom” that the Church befriend the “mam[m]on of unright[eous]ness” so that the world would not destroy them.⁵⁹ It was “wise” for the Missouri Saints to make a show as if to sell their Jackson County lands even though they had no intention of doing so, and it was also “wise” not to let on that they had received such instructions.⁶⁰ In these and other cases, prophetic wisdom

54. BC 16:9–13, 22–23.

55. Revelation Book 1, p. 66, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 102–103.

56. Susan Staker, “The Lord Said, Thy Wife Is a Very Fair Woman to Look Upon: The Book of Abraham, Secrets, and Lying for the Lord,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, edited by Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 296–98.

57. David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 53–54.

58. Revelation Book 1, p. 94, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 160–61; Ezra Booth, “Mormonism – Nos. VIII – IX.,” *Ohio Star* 2, no. 49 (Dec 8, 1831).

59. Revelation Book 1, p. 129, as published in *Manuscript Revelation Books*, 230–31.

60. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps et al., August 18, 1833, as published in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 311.

was surprisingly instrumentalist. The transgression of certain human conventions in order to advance the cause of Zion became an esoteric act of worship, reserved for spiritually mature and discerning persons who were capable of handling the responsibility.

These are, of course, extreme examples chosen for their similarity to the case under study. Esoterism was not merely used as an excuse to violate the law or to keep inconvenient secrets. Rather, mysticism seems to have pervaded virtually every aspect of early Mormon life. As Richard Bushman has written, “The mystical powers of priesthood blended with the everyday business of running the Church.”⁶¹ Mormons saw their movement as a spiritual recapitulation of the ancient Christian order, and regularly re-enacted biblical narratives in their daily lives.⁶² This perspective was deeply rooted in Mormonism’s unique brand of dispensationalism. Protestant Christians shared the idea that history was comprised of a series of divine dispensations or covenants, but they generally understood each new era to represent a new and different mode of divine government. The Mormons, by contrast, saw dispensations as repeating cycles of apostasy and restoration, all operating under the same plan of divine government, with similar historical patterns recurring in each era. Thus modern Mormons of the final dispensation repeated the roles of important figures from previous dispensations, such that, for example, Joseph Smith was a new Moses and Oliver Cowdery a new Aaron. Similarly, through the fictionalization of the United Firm revelations the everyday business of running the Firm became a mystical reiteration and realization of the ancient order of Enoch. Simple administrative tasks became imbued with religious meaning. Individual modern Mormons were assigned individual ancient counterparts whose roles they were to fulfill. This habit of blending the practical and the mystical may well have been one of early Mormonism’s most potent appeals.

Conclusion

If ever the modern edition of the D&C is edited in light of the findings of the *Joseph Smith Papers* project, the 1835 revisions to the United Firm revelations will pose a unique challenge. The editorial committee will have to grapple with the philosophical possibility that certain revisions

61. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 258.

62. Christopher Smith, “Joseph Smith in Hermeneutical Crisis,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 99–100.

made to these revelations for the purpose of fictionalizing them may in fact have increased rather than decreased their spiritual potency. Joseph Smith himself seems not to have been averse to this prospect. And if Orson Pratt was correct that the impetus for these revisions came by way of inspiration, then the Lord may not be averse to it, either.

Whatever one's verdict on the theological question of inspired fictionalization, the 1835 editing of these revelations will remain a compelling and important chapter in early Mormon history. The historical fictionalization of the United Firm revelations protected the Church from creditors while also embodying the mystical quest to recreate the ancient order of Enoch and to recover the pure, unconfused language of Adam. It was at once deception and *mysterium*—at once fiction and scripture. For anti-Mormon writers like West and Arbaugh, the substitution of the D&C code names was simply an amusing example of the Mormon obsession with secrecy. But for Mormon leaders like Orson Pratt, it was an instance of divine, esoteric wisdom tailored to difficult circumstances. ☀

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The Great God, the Divine Mind, and the Ideal Absolute: Orson Pratt's Intelligent-Matter Theory and the Gods of Emerson and James

Jordan Watkins

Orson Pratt's God and Gods

EARLY LATTER-DAY SAINT LEADER and thinker Orson Pratt axiomatically believed that immateriality “is the negative of all existence, or merely another name for nothing,” and that “the *primary powers* of all material substance must be *intelligent*.” Pratt referred to the totality of intelligent matter as the “Great God.” His monism aligns closely with some forms of panentheism, a cosmology, offering a middle way between theism and pantheism, which posits both God’s immanence in and transcendence of the world. For Pratt, all other beings depend upon the Great God for their existence, and though the Great God interpenetrates all realities, he is not synonymous with them. Pratt’s theology is also polytheistic, for he believed that the “Great God,” or the “Great First Cause,” self-combined to form personal Gods. Thus, he proposed the existence of ontologically distinct Gods, including an impersonal and independent Great God, which exists as the sum of intelligent matter, and dependent personal Gods formed from the self-combination of this intelligent matter into personages.¹

1. Pratt, “Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe,” in *The*

Pratt's theology allows for interesting ideational comparisons with American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson and American pragmatist William James, both of whose writings display panentheistic, pantheistic, or polytheistic notions. Emerson's panentheistic idealism permits comparisons with Pratt's formulation of the Great God, while James's plural-pantheistic/panentheistic and polytheistic speculations bear similarities with Pratt's ideas regarding his Great God and his personal Gods. The purpose of this paper is to outline Pratt's conceptions of God and compare them with aspects of Emerson's and James's thought, in hopes that such comparisons will help situate Pratt—and one strain of Mormon thought—within nineteenth-century American intellectual history. Though some striking similarities arise in this comparative analysis, close examination illuminates fundamental differences and warns against the Latter-day Saint proclivity to employ prominent American intellectuals in their missiological and intellectual causes.²

Essential Orson Pratt, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 175, 189, emphasis in original. Pratt also referred to the Great God as the Holy Spirit, the Supreme Intelligence, and, somewhat confusingly, as God. While previously arguing that Pratt's "neo-absolute doctrine" resulted in "an 'impersonal pantheism,'" Mormon scholar Blake Ostler later refined his interpretation, concluding that Pratt's Great God "includes within his experience all realities or intelligences though he is not identical with them." Ostler, "The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982): 73; and Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 1: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001), 84. For an overview of ancient and modern panentheistic views, see John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). See also, Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke, eds., *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

2. In comparing Emerson's thought with Joseph Smith's theology, Benjamin E. Park argues that "while Emerson did sense corruption in modern Christianity, his idea of how to fix it did not align with the visions and revelations of Joseph Smith." Park, "'Build Therefore, Your Own World': Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, and American Antebellum Thought," *The Journal of Mormon History* 36 (Winter 2010): 41. Speaking to the Latter-day Saint Church in 2004, Jeffrey R. Holland, an LDS apostle, utilized lines from Emerson's "Divinity School Address" to provide context for Joseph Smith's revelatory claims. Noting Roger Williams's desire for new apostles and Jonathan Edwards's reasoning that a concerned God must speak, Holland proceeded to explain, "Emerson rocked the very foundations of New England ecclesiastical orthodoxy when he said to the

Pratt, Emerson, and James borrowed from numerous and widely varying sources and in doing so responded to prominent contemporary Protestant frameworks. In many ways, each thinker shaped their conceptions of God in reaction to common Anglo-American beliefs. Pratt's views on God, largely clarified in relation to immaterialism, made him somewhat radical within an already unconventional American religion. Emerson, a contemporary of Pratt, built upon but also broke from Puritan and Unitarian thought. He substituted Christ with mind as the bridge between man and God, which elicited condemnation from erstwhile Unitarian colleagues, while Old Lights and New Lights branded him an atheist. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries James fashioned his conception of God in opposition to the "metaphysical monster" of classical theism, resulting in a deity who might not be able to save himself let alone America's Christians. These three thinkers promoted religious beliefs that a considerable portion of the population deemed dangerously unorthodox. Least known among them, but equally radical, Pratt proposed a theology which even many of his co-religionists opposed.³

Divinity School at Harvard: 'It is my duty to say to you that the need was never greater [for] new revelation than now.' 'The doctrine of inspiration is lost. . . . Miracles, prophecy, . . . the holy life, exist as ancient history [only]. . . . Men have come to speak of . . . revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead. . . . It is the office of a true teacher,' he warned, 'to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake.'" The LDS-produced film, *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration*, first shown in 2005 at the Church's visitors' center in Salt Lake, similarly redacts and displays as text this portion of Emerson's address. Holland, "Prophets, Seers, and Revelators," *Ensign* (November 2004): 8; and Emerson, "An Address Delivered Before the Senior Class in Divinity College," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 5 vols., ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971–94), 1:80, 84, 89. The Mormon Church, of course, is not the only organization or group, religious or secular, who has found Emerson useful. Patrick Keane shrewdly notes that "given his proclivity toward ambiguity, paradox, equivocation, even contradiction, Emerson is open to an unusually wide spectrum of interpretation and misprision . . . he invites creative appropriation, use, and abuse." Keane, *Emerson, Romanticism, and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic "Light of all Our Day"* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 301. On uses of Emerson see, for example, Charles E. Mitchell, *Individualism and Its Discontents: Appropriations of Emerson, 1880–1950* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

3. Pratt's intelligent-matter theory contributed to his private and public reproof from church leaders, but also helped ensure his legacy as a Mormon intellectual. His ideas on the Mormon Godhead incited public and private priesthood

In 1845, for the first time in print, Pratt began developing his intelligent-matter theory. In his article, “Mormon Philosophy. Space, Duration, and Matter,” he built upon Joseph Smith’s revelatory dictations on eternalism and materialism. A May 6, 1833 revelation refers to the eternality of “the elements.” “Man was also in the beginning with God,” the dictation reads, “Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. . . . For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy.” As with many of his revelatory declarations, Smith did not explain the implications of this eternalism, at least not in print, but he continued to put

denunciations. See Gary J. Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2002); England, 188–193, 206, 209–215, 227–230; and Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Volume Two: 1848–1852* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2005), 188. Variations on Pratt’s theology found advocacy among later Latter-day Saints thinkers, most notably Charles W. Penrose, B.H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, Nels L. Nelson, and, more recently, W. Cleon Skousen. Consequently, Pratt’s speculative theology has persisted in truncated forms despite Young’s effacing efforts. See Ostler, “The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,” 66–71; and England, 293–294. Further, outside of Mormon thought, Pratt’s ideas, along with those of his brother Parley, compare significantly with Alfred North Whitehead’s “actual occasions.” Ostler describes the Pratts as the “first true process theologians,” *Exploring Mormon Thought*, Volume 1, 82. On the mind as a replacement for Christ in Emerson’s thought see, Richard Geldard, *God in Concord: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Awakening to the Infinite* (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1999), 80. On contemporary condemnatory responses to Emerson’s Harvard Divinity School Address, see Andrews Norton, “The New School in Literature and Religion,” *Daily Advertiser* (August 27, 1838): 2, in *Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33–35; Theophilus Parsons, “The New School and Its Opponents,” *Daily Advertiser* (August 30, 1838): 2, in *Emerson and Thoreau*, 36–38; G.T. Davis, “Review of Divinity School Address,” *Morning Post* (August 31, 1838): 1, in *Emerson and Thoreau*, 38–41; “An Address delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College,” *Christian Examiner and General Review* 25 (November 1838): 266–267, in American Periodical Series (hereafter cited as APS) [database online], UMI-Proquest (accessed on April 29, 2008); “Miscellaneous Notices; An Address, delivered before the Senior Class, in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday evening, July 15, 1838,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 10, no. 4 (November 1, 1838): 670–674, in APS [database online], UMI-Proquest (accessed on April 29, 2009); and J.W. Alexander, Albert Dod, and Charles Hodge, “Review 3,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 9, no. 1 (January 1839): 95, in APS [database online], UMI-Proquest (accessed on April 29, 2009).

forth the teaching. The 1833 revelation does not clearly define “the elements,” though it seems to imply the eternity of both matter and spirit. Regardless, in August 1839, Williard Richards recorded Smith as stating that “the Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity & will exist to eternity.” Parley P. Pratt, Orson’s brother, further developed this teaching in his 1840 essay, “The Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter,” wherein he proposed that “Matter and Spirit are the two great principles of all existence,” before proceeding to assert that “every thing animate and inanimate is composed of one or the other, or both of these eternal principles.” Though the Pratts often failed to cite their sources, a practice characteristic for much nineteenth-century non-fictional composition, the internal evidence suggests that the brothers frequently borrowed ideas from Smith and from each other.⁴

Parley’s views, suggesting a materialistic monism, relate to Smith’s later teaching on spirit as refined matter. Though lacking external evidence, Smith seems to be the author of the April 1842 editorial, “Try the Spirits,” which asserts that “spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic, and refined matter than the body.” The following year, in May 1843, according to William Clayton, Smith, after hearing a Methodist preacher speak in Ramus, Illinois, offered a few corrections: “Speaking of eternal duration of matter, he I [sic] said. There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter but is more fine or pure and can only be discerned by purer eyes.” In his 1844 essay, “Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body,” Parley, using condemnatory language characteristic of both Pratts, proposed that “all persons except materialists must be infidels,” for “man’s body is as eternal as his soul, or his spirit.” Parley further developed these ideas in later writings, while, during the same period, Orson built upon them in formulating his intelligent-matter theory.⁵

4. Doctrine and Covenants (hereafter cited as D&C) (1835) 82:5; and D&C (1981) 93:29, 33; Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1980), 9; Parley P. Pratt, *Millennium, and Other Poems: To Which Is Annexed, a Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* (New York: W. Molineux, 1840), 105.

5. Smith, “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 11 (April 1, 1842): 745; Smith, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 203; D&C (1981), 131:7; and Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria, ... The Fountain of Knowledge; Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo, Ill: John Taylor, 1844), 31. Parley explored these ideas further in “Materialism” (1845) and in his magnum opus, *Key to the Science of Theology* (1855). On “Materiality,” see Benjamin E. Park and Jordan T. Watkins, “The Riches of Mormon

In “Mormon Philosophy,” Orson equated matter with “every substance in space, whether visible or invisible, sensible or insensible, intelligent or unintelligent” and proposed a kind of atomism in describing matter as made up of “minute, solid, hard impenetrable, moveable, immutable atoms,” which exist eternally. As with Newton, Pratt assumed the existence of only one kind of homogeneous matter of which all atoms are composed. But, purporting to correct Newton, Pratt explained that these atoms “must be intelligent—having self moving powers … this intelligence is not the EFFECT, but the cause of combination—not derived from EXPERIENCE, but self existant and eternal.” Pratt developed this idea in later writings, especially in his pamphlet *Great First Cause* (1851). There Pratt explained that this self-existent and eternal intelligent matter self-combined to form personal Gods, but also argued that “all the organizations of worlds, of minerals, of vegetables, of men, of angels, of spirits” resulted from the design of these particles. Pratt concluded, “all the ponderable substances of nature … originated from one elementary simple substance … with intelligence sufficient to govern it in all its infinitude of combinations and operations.” Pratt’s descriptions about the Great God suggest a monistic panentheism in which God independently exists as the sum of intelligent matter, but, existing as totality in perfection, is not synonymous with particular material imperfections, all of which are dependent upon the Great God. In his formulation, Pratt offered a Mormon version of the Great Chain in Being, one that seemed to solve the puzzle of Smith’s late teachings on gods and godhood by placing the Great God at the end of the chain. Pratt’s idea about God shaped his explanation of the Godhead.⁶

Materialism: Parley P. Pratt’s ‘Materiality’ and Early Mormon Theology,” in *Mormon Historical Studies* (forthcoming).

6. Pratt, “Mormon Philosophy. Space, Duration, and Matter,” in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 32, 35; and Pratt, “Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe,” in *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 196. For Pratt’s comprehensive explanation of matter, see *Absurdities of Immaterialism, or, A Reply to T. W. P. Taylder’s Pamphlet, Entitled, “The Materialism of the Mormons or Latter-day Saints, Examined and Exposed”* (1849), in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 61–108. In his writings Pratt often asserted matter’s intelligence or capacity for intelligence. He allowed for the possible existence of unintelligent matter, though he argued that unintelligent matter had never been observed. In *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, parenthetically noted, Pratt included a reference to unintelligent matter but included, in parenthesis, “if such exist,” 66. Two years later, in *Great First Cause*, Pratt noted that if inert or unintelligent matter exists, then it is acted upon by an equal or greater quantity of widely dispersed

Pratt first printed his unique ideas about the Godhead's organization in his article "Questions on the Origin of Man" (1845), wherein he implied that the Godhead was formed through the union of eternal, intelligent particles. "Did the elementary atoms hold a council together, and enter into an agreement of an eternal union, for each others benefit and exaltation in the scale of being?" he queried. Pratt later affirmed in *Great First Cause* that "all the organizations of worlds," including "the spiritual personages of the Father ... Son, and ... Holy Ghost ... must have been the result of the self combinations and unions of the pre-existent, intelligent, powerful, and eternal particles of substance." The Father and the Son depend upon this substance for their existence and, Pratt explained, these "Personal Gods, then, have a beginning: they exist first as spirits, then as men clothed with mortal flesh, then as Gods clothed with immortal tabernacles." The Father and the Son resulted from the self-combination of a substance that eternally possesses godly attributes, and this substance, existing in communion, constitute the Great God. Pratt identified the Holy Spirit, which may or may not also consist of a personage of spirit, as the Great God and the only independent member of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit acts eternally throughout space and thus exists as an omnipresent and independent substance.⁷

intelligent matter, 186–189. On a few occasions he spoke of substances existing without the capacity of gaining or increasing in intelligence. For example, in 1853 Pratt wrote that, "There is no substance in the universe which feels and thinks now, but what has eternally possessed that capacity. These capacities may be suspended for a season, but never can be annihilated. A substance which has not these capacities now, must eternally remain without them." Pratt, "The Pre-Existence of Man" 1, no. 7 (July 1853), in *The Seer* (Washington, D.C., 1853–1854; reprint, Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2000), 102 (all page citations from *The Seer* refer to the reprint edition). Mormon thinkers differ as to whether Smith's late teachings support an infinite regress model, wherein Christ's father had a father, *ad infinitum*, monarchical monotheism, which posits that Christ's father is the God of all other gods, or some other variation. For the teachings under debate, see *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–362, 378–383. For an interpretation supporting monarchical monotheism, also labeled as kingship monotheism, see Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 2: The Problems of Theism and the Love of God* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006), 433–449; and Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 3: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City, Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 125–158. On the Great Chain of Being in Mormon thought, see Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 1–52.

7. Pratt, "Questions on the Origin of Man," in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 29; Pratt, "Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe," 196; Pratt,

In *The Kingdom of God* (1848), Pratt distinguished God the Holy Spirit from God the Father and God the Son in describing the Holy Spirit as “an infinite number of [active, omniscient, and omnipotent] atoms … everywhere in infinite space.” In *Absurdities of Immaterialism* (1849), he explained that all atoms of the Holy Spirit exist in identical states of feeling and thought through an immediate transfer of knowledge “probably equal in velocity to the transfer of the various notions gained by sensation.” The Holy Spirit thus possesses omniscient and omnipresent qualities and, through the transfer of feeling and thought among intelligent atoms, shares these qualities with God the Father and God the Son. While God the Father and God the Son are bound by spatial limitations, they possess the same intelligence as the Holy Spirit. Respecting the Holy Spirit’s attributes, existing as eternal substance in communion, Pratt wrote: “His majesty and power, His wisdom and greatness, His goodness and love, shine forth in every department of creation, with a glory that is ineffable, immortal, and eternal.” While Pratt held that the Great God’s attributes of truth, light, and knowledge had no beginning, and thus exist inherently within intelligent matter, he suggested that perhaps some of the Great God’s knowledge and feelings resulted from experience. Pratt’s Great God works throughout the universe, or experiences all that can be experienced, and in this sense Pratt’s view is neo-absolutist. These ideas, along with Pratt’s further explanations of the “Great First Cause” and the Godhead, provide a framework through which comparisons with Emerson’s and James’s thought highlight the particularities of each thinker’s views.⁸

“The Pre-Existence of Man,” 1, no. 9 (September 1853), in *The Seer*, 130; and Pratt, “‘The Pre-Existence of Man’—An Excerpt,” in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 302. Hereafter, unless identified as representing one of the Godhead, references to Pratt’s God refers to the Great God. This is not to say that Pratt always explicitly identified the God he spoke of, though the context of his discussion often makes the connection obvious. Pratt also identified the substance that made up God as a “powerful agent” or a “fluid.” In 1855 he stated, “I am inclined to think … that there is such a being as a personal Holy Ghost. . . . But one thing is certain, whether there is personal Holy Spirit or not, there is an inexhaustible quantity of that Spirit that is not a person.” Pratt, “The Holy Spirit and the Godhead” in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 352.

8. Pratt, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, 54, emphasis in original; Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, 92; and Pratt, “Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe,” 197. On the Great God and experience, see Pratt, “The Pre-Existence of Man,” 1, no. 9 (September 1853), 131. As Ostler explains, “Pratt argued that the synthesis of a fullness of experience

Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Divine Mind

Ralph Waldo Emerson's ability to address and appropriate a variety of ideas from an array of thinkers and conceptual frameworks while providing an alternative worldview contributed to his success as an orator and writer during his lifetime and his lasting legacy as a nineteenth-century American intellectual. Emerson often focused on the religious, or reshaping the religious, as evidenced in his writings, wherein he revised the traditional conception of God. In June 1835, Emerson wrote in his journal, "The best we can say of God we mean of the mind as it is known to us." Emerson's Mind, or God, exists in and through all, but is not made up of corporeal parts, and thus is both at once one with and independent of humankind and nature. Emerson's view, like Pratt's idea of God, comes close to panentheism. His reading of both Western and Eastern thought, through a Platonic lens, led Emerson to conceive of God as the Divine Mind. As Richard Geldard notes, "To find the way in which mind could be known as infinite and eternal became the aim of [Emerson's] intellectual life." While Emerson's ontological descriptions of God differ from Pratt's, Emerson's thought contains monistic and panentheistic aspects similar to, though distinct from, Pratt's ideas on God.⁹

Pratt argued that all things "spiritual and temporal," including God, are made of self-existing particles. Emerson, like Pratt, did not adhere to the popular mind/body Cartesian dualism, but whereas Pratt based

which arises from the experiences of all the material particles and resultant organized entities constitutes the Supreme Intelligence and comprises the attributes or essence of God," *Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 1: The Attributes of God*, 83. On Pratt as a neo-absolutist see Ostler, "The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought," 73. For Pratt, the Holy Spirit did not literally exist everywhere, for his materialistic worldview required that no two atoms could exist at the same time in the same place. Thus, Pratt used the term "everywhere" to stress the active influence of the Holy Spirit throughout space. Although Pratt specifically used gendered pronouns to identify the Great God, it is difficult to know what Pratt meant, if anything, through such labels.

9. Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 16 vols., ed. William H. Gilman, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960–82), 5:271; Geldard, *The Spiritual Teachings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), 139. The above citation is perhaps the most important statement by Emerson with respect to God. Throughout the text when referring to Emerson's thought, I use Mind, Divine Mind, God, and Over-Soul interchangeably. For an example of Emerson's panentheistic view see, "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," in *Collected Works*, 4:100. Here, Emerson stated, "God is a substance."

his monism in a materialistic framework, Emerson's thought reflects a qualitative monism where Mind is, as Robert Detweiler noted, "the basic substance of reality ... man and nature are components of mind and thus share a single substance." In his June 1835 journal entry, Emerson recorded, "Our compound nature differences us from God, but our Reason is not to be distinguished from the divine Essence." Pratt viewed God as the unified self-existent, intelligent material particles of substance. Emerson equated God with the immaterial and independent Divine Mind, and all existence, including material substance, exists as an emanation of this Mind. Pratt viewed God and all existence as made up of matter, while Emerson labeled Divine Mind as the ultimate reality, and the wellspring of all existence. Yet, similarities arise in comparing their emphases on God's intelligence and omnipresence.¹⁰

For both Emerson and Pratt, God acted as an intimately governing, highly intelligent force, constantly at work throughout the universe. Pratt's "simple substance" possesses "intelligence sufficient to govern [the universe] in all its infinitude of combinations and operations, producing all the immense variety of phenomena constantly taking place throughout the wide domains of universal nature." Indeed, "He is in all things and through all things." The Holy Spirit, for Pratt, is synonymous with this substance: "The elements of the earth, and all the materials of the heavenly worlds, are full of this pure and holy Substance, called the Spirit." It is from "this universal Spirit" that natural laws flow. This substance, possessing unmatched intelligence, contains "a will, a self-moving power, knowledge, wisdom, love, goodness, holiness, justice, mercy, and every intellectual and moral attribute possessed by the Father and Son." Though ontologically different from Pratt's God, Emerson's God works in

10. Detweiler, "Emerson's Concept of God" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Florida, 1962), 184; and Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, 5:270. Pratt's ontological understanding reveals itself more easily than Emerson's, in large part due to the respective foci of each thinker. For Pratt, and indeed for Emerson and James as well, matter, particles, and atoms are similar if not synonymous. As Peter A. Obuchowski has argued, "Emerson's work reflects a consistent attempt to fashion a monism reconciling the material and spiritual dimensions of human experience." Emerson's epistemology compares significantly with Pratt's. For Emerson, like Pratt, "science nourished and helped frame his mature religious position." For both thinkers, any perceived conflict between science and religion could be resolved through correcting erroneous science and false religion. Obuchowski, *Emerson and Science: Goethe, Monism and the Search for Unity* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2005), 61, 71.

similar ways, and possesses similar attributes.¹¹

Emerson's God is synonymous with Mind and exists within the soul of both man and nature. In a speech given at Boston's Masonic Temple in 1838 Emerson spoke on the "Doctrine of the Soul." He described man as "related by his form to the whole world, and by his soul to the whole universe, with faculties buried in time and space, but animated by a soul that dwells out of time and space." Man relates to all exterior phenomena because the world and universe are animated by the "Over-Soul." In Emerson's focus on man, he regarded the soul as the "great responsible Thinker and Actor moving wherever moves a man." As he wrote in "Spiritual Laws," "God exists. There is a soul at the center of nature and over the will of every man." Thus, Emerson's ubiquitous God is fully governing: "A little consideration of what takes place around us every day would show us that a higher law than that of our will regulates events." The transcendent Over-Soul is the ultimate source of truth from which law emanates and the universe is deified.¹²

Emerson's statements on God's omnipresent nature bear similarity to Pratt's ideas of intelligent-matter and, were it not for the obvious ontological differences, their ideas on God parallel each other. In Emerson's essay "Worship," first published in 1860, he observed, "I find the omnipresence and the almighty in the reaction of every atom in nature." Not only do Emerson's atoms possess divine attributes but they seem to possess self-moving power: "the primordial atoms are prefigured and predetermined to moral issues, are in search of justice, and ultimate right is done." The primordial atoms possessed moral qualities and thus, for Emerson, the universe was infused with moral law.¹³

Yet, further along in "Worship," Emerson introduces another aspect to his atomism, rendering the divine atoms distinct from Pratt's intelligent matter. He stated that "the police and sincerity of the universe are secured by God's delegating his divinity to every particle. . . . God has delegated himself to a million deputies." Emerson implied that God, as delegator, is independent of the particles, whereas for Pratt, God, as re-

11. Pratt, *Great First Cause*, 196–204, quotes on 196, 197, 201, and 202–203.

12. Emerson, "Doctrine of the Soul" in *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 3 vols., ed. Stephen E. Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, and Wallace E. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959–72), 3:7, 11; and Emerson, "Spiritual Laws," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols., Centenary Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903–4), 2:138–39.

13. Emerson, "Worship," in *Complete Works*, 6:217, 219.

ceptor, is dependent upon the particles. Emerson further stated, “I look on those sentiments which make the glory of the human being, love, humility, faith, as being also the intimacy of Divinity in the atoms.” In this statement as well Emerson allowed for Mind, or God, to exist independent of these atoms that possess “the intimacy of Divinity.”¹⁴

In “Worship,” Emerson further distinguished atoms from God, but also man from God. He sought to explain that when man achieves a heightened consciousness he necessarily obeys God:

I think that the last lesson of life, the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience, a necessitated freedom. Man is made of the same atoms as the world is, he shares the same impressions, predispositions and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure.

Obedience, be it man’s or nature’s, requires voluntary worship through self-illumination, the result of which permits guidance from an indwelling, though self-existent force, and consequently Emerson’s God exists independent of, but in communion with, man and nature. Certainly Emerson’s divine atoms respond to God as opposed to Pratt’s intelligent-matter particles which, existing in totality, form the Great God, and combine to create personal Gods. Though he largely escapes ontological explanation, Emerson’s God functions similarly to Pratt’s Great God. Indeed, Emerson possessed panentheistic notions that closely parallel Pratt’s. Another American intellectual, William James, who, incidentally, was Emerson’s godson, also advocated panentheistic ideas. But in his writings, which display an interest in a finite God, evidence significant differences from the views of Emerson and remarkable similarities with those of Pratt.¹⁵

William James’s Possible God(s)

William James formed his mature conception of a possible God in response to traditional absolutistic and theistic ideologies and as a construction of his pragmatic and radically empiricist worldview. For God to

14. Ibid., 6:221–223, 231.

15. Ibid., 6:240.

exist, he could not be transcendent, infinite, or omnipotent, for this sort of “metaphysical monster . . . is absolutely worthless,” clothed in a “pompous robe of adjectives” and having no “positive connexion with this actual world of finite human lives.” Based on these and similar statements, James’s view of what God was not is much easier to identify than his view of what God could be. He did consistently imply, if not explicitly state, that for God to exist, he must be imperfect, finite, dependent, immanent, progressing, and possibly plural. We are left with a variety of ontological possibilities with respect to James’s God. Among these include God as “superhuman consciousness,” “superhuman forces,” and “the purposive structure of pure experience.” The variety and inconclusive nature of James’s thought on a possible God opens the way to multiple interpretations, providing many possible comparisons with Mormon thought. For the purposes of this study, the pantheistic, panentheistic, and finitistic aspects of James’ thought are most relevant. Before delving into these notions, James’s own words about God reveal his approach to dealing with deity.¹⁶

16. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, in *William James: Writings, 1902–1910*, ed. Bruce Kucklick (New York: The Library of America, 1987), 401; James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, in *William James: Writings, 1902–1910*, 495, 539; Robert J. Vanden Burgt, *The Religious Philosophy of William James* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1981), 107; Henry Samuel Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 227; and Wesley Cooper, *The Unity of William James’s Thought* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 140. Emerson’s transcendent Over-Soul is impossible in James’s theology. See, for example, James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 468. Panpsychism holds that “mind, in some form, exists in all things” where things are defined as “particular configurations of mass/energy.” David Skrbina, historian of panpsychism, provides a helpful definition: “All objects, or systems of object, possess a singular inner experience of the world around them.” Skrbina adeptly explains the difficulty in defining panpsychism in *Panpsychism in the West* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005), 2, 15–22. Both Breck England, Pratt’s biographer, and Mormon philosopher Sterling McMurrin found Pratt’s intelligent-matter theory similar to panpsychism. James’s thought developed overtime, and near the end of his life, he adopted a “radically empiricist, pluralistically panpsychist position.” David C. Lamberth, *William James and the Metaphysics of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3. James’s particular version of panpsychism is both monistic and pluralistic. For James, as Skrbina explained, “the monism resides in the fact that all things are pure experience; the pluralism lies in the fact that all things . . . are objects with their own independent psychical perspectives,” 147. With respect to the importance

In 1904 James Bissett Pratt, a student of philosophy under James at Harvard, presented James with a questionnaire on belief in God. James's response elucidates his qualified theological sense. When asked what James meant by God, he replied, "A combination of Ideality and (final) efficacy." Is God a person? "He must be cognizant and responsive in some way." Is he only a force? "He must do." Is God simply an attitude of the Universe? "Yes, but more conscious. 'God,' to me, is not the only spiritual reality to believe in. Religion means primarily a universe of spiritual relations surrounding the earthly practical ones, not merely relations of 'value,' but agencies and their activities." James admitted his ambivalence about God's relation to mankind. When asked to state if he was uncertain in any of these answers, he simply replied, "Uncertain." James found a belief in God important "only for the social reasons." Did James view God as a being or an ideal? "More as a more powerful ally of my own ideals." James never personally experienced God, who, for him, was "dimly real," but he emphatically believed that others had experienced God. James never described God concisely because life never revealed God fully and consistently. His vague answers about the possibility of God and his nature make comparisons difficult, and yet some of the possibilities James proposed parallel Pratt's ideas on intelligent-matter and present uncertain but possible similarities.¹⁷

In lecture three of *Pragmatism* he discussed some metaphysical problems in light of his pragmatic worldview, and commented on matter and God in terms similar to Pratt. In asking if God is the cause of the world's formation and state, as a theist believes, or if "bits of matter following their laws" are responsible, as a materialist would argue, James stated that either way, "They are God or the atoms, respectively. . . . The God, if there, has been doing just what atoms could do—appearing in the character of atoms, so to speak—and earning such gratitude as is due to atoms, and no more." James later distinguished God from atoms in *The Meaning of Truth*, his sequel to *Pragmatism*, where he noted that matter cannot be a synonym for God because "the chief call for a God on modern men's

of panpsychism in James's thought see Lamberth, 3–5, 57; Marcus P. Ford, "William James," in *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 99–102; D. S. Clarke, *Panpsychism and the Religious Attitude* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), vi–viii; and Skrbina, 145, 149. Henry Samuel Levinson argued that James was interested in panpsychism for religious reasons, and that his attachment to it was limited. Levinson, 177–178.

17. James, Essays, in *William James: Writings, 1902–1910*, 1183–1185.

part is for a being who will inwardly recognize them and judge them sympathetically.” No doubt James had not conceptualized intelligent-matter of the kind Pratt conceived, which possessed all godly attributes, including the ability to judge sympathetically. Yet, James’s conception of possible God(s) possesses pantheistic, panentheistic, and polytheistic similarities to Pratt’s idea of the Great God and his understanding of personal Gods.¹⁸

Pratt explained that a universal, or absolute God existed independent of, but also within particular Gods. Similarly, at least once, James commented on the possibility of an absolute (though not an absolute God), and a finite God existing as the most ideal portion of the absolute. In James’s, *A Pluralistic Universe*, which represents his “last sustained and completed philosophical effort,” he granted the absolute the possibility of existing, while emphasizing God’s finite nature. Amidst an attack on an absolutist God, James stated, “I believe that the only God worthy of the name *must* be finite. . . . If the absolute exist in addition—and the hypothesis must, in spite of its irrational features, still be left open—then the absolute is only the wider cosmic whole of which our God is but the most ideal portion.” James’s sense of the finite allows for the possibility of an absolute, but for him, this is not God. The absolute is, if it exists, a universal similar to Pratt’s Great God. Whereas for James it was a possibility, for Pratt it was a fundamental truth. James’s God bears similarity to Pratt’s particular Gods, in representing the “most ideal portion” of the absolute, or in Pratt’s words, the “self-combinations and union of the pre-existent, intelligent, powerful, and eternal particles of substances” which result in “the most superior of all other personages.” Indeed, James’s God compares both with Pratt’s Great God and his particular Gods in a variety of ways. Among James’s panexperiential, pantheistic, and panentheistic notions, his idea of immanence provides the most interesting comparison.¹⁹

In *A Pluralistic Universe* James placed his particular worldview in a pantheistic framework. He noted, “the only opinions quite worthy of arresting our attention will fall within the general scope of what may roughly be called the pantheistic vision.” Different from most proponents of pantheism, James focused on individual identity, which led him away from an *absolute* pantheistic God to an *ultimate* pantheistic God, where the *ultimate* God is the best possible God. Scholar Henry Levinson

18. James, *Pragmatism*, 529; and James, *The Meaning of Truth*, in *William James: Writings, 1902–1910*, 922n.

19. Lamberth, 151; and Pratt, “Great First Cause, or the Self-Moving Forces of the Universe,” 196, 197.

labeled James's specific view "pluralistic pantheism," based on the idea that James's pantheism "collapsed the radical discrepancy in vantage points by construing divinity distributively instead of collectively." In other words, the divine exists not in the totality of individual existence, but in the individuals themselves. Thus, James did away with the standard pantheistic notion which, he explained, "almost breaks out as great a bar [as theism] to intimacy between the divine and the human" by upholding the absolute as an infinite being which nonsensically incorporates man's finitude. Immanence, in James's understanding, is possible because God and the world are of the same substance. Thus, distributively, God exists everywhere. Yet, through a co-consciousness we are both parts of God and individual selves. James's view seems to align more closely with panentheism than pantheism. His pluralistic panentheism, which places God's dependence upon and separation from the world's entities, compares most significantly with Pratt's monistic panentheism, where "God is conceived of as an immanent presence which both acts upon and is acted upon by all other realities in the physical universe." For both Pratt and James, this kind of interaction is possible only with a finite God.²⁰

Perhaps the most obvious comparisons between Mormonism's God and James's God lay in their finitistic conceptions of deity. Pratt's emphasis on the Great God as independent of the particular Gods perhaps muddies these waters some, and yet his descriptions about God the Father and God the Son as beings existing in time provides one example of the types of possible comparisons along these lines.²¹

20. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 643–644, 648; Levinson, 250; and Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought, Volume 1: The Attributes of God*, 84. On James' God as an ultimate rather than an absolute pantheistic God, see Levinson, 202–203. On immanence as impossible for James, see *Pragmatism*, 523–540. Lamberth noted that James threw "in his lot with the intimacy that results from spiritualistic philosophies by taking God and the world to be of the same order and 'substance,'" 173. On God as distributively everywhere and as co-consciousness see Cooper, 141 and Burgt, 107, respectively.

21. Some scholarship exists on this relationship, but the most important work to date is Jared Hickman's study, "Politics All the Way Up: Mormonism, Pragmatism, and Finitist Political Theology," in *Politics and Mormonism*, ed. Nathan B. Oman and Russell Arben Fox (Georgetown University Press, forthcoming). "For Pratt, the Great God exceeds temporal bounds, at least in the sense of possessing the ability to look backward and forward through eternity. And yet, according to Pratt's own argument, existence for any substance requires duration. Consequently, eternity must be a divisible duration for the Great God to exist.

Pratt's particular materialism dictated that everything in existence, including the spiritual, conform to temporal laws. In "The Kingdom of God" he explained that Christ and his Father exist "both in time and in space, and [have] as much relation to them as man or any other being." This included the particles that constituted Pratt's Great God. As James would later busy himself in responding to absolutists and theists, so Pratt combated the immaterialists. For Pratt, existence out of time and space meant non-existence, and thus he labeled the immaterialists as atheists. James's theological looseness brought him up short of a similar attack, but he emphasized the priority of beings in time given a pluralistic world-view.²²

In James's chapter on "Monistic Idealism" in *A Pluralistic Universe* he contrasted the monistic and pluralistic ideologies and elucidated his view of God in time. He noted that for absolutists, the absolute is timeless. But for pluralists,

time remains as real as anything, and nothing in the universe is great or static or eternal enough not to have some history. But the world that each of us feels most intimately at home with is that of beings with histories that play into our history, whom we can help in their vicissitudes even as they help us in ours.

Certainly both Pratt's God and Gods contain "histories that play into our history" and while James's God(s) may possess ontological differences, they all belong in time.²³

The Ontological and Relational Existence of God with the Universe

Pratt, Emerson, and James also existed in time and propounded theological ideas in specific contexts. Reflecting on the comparisons presented here wonders where, on the whole, Pratt really differed from Emerson

For Pratt, then, the Great God exists in time." Terryl L. Givens argues that, for Joseph Smith, "all we have is historical time—but it is transformed into a dimension that extends infinitely in both directions." Givens, "Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plenitude," in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

22. Pratt, "The Kingdom of God, Part 1," 52, 53; and Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, 77–79.

23. James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, 651–652.

and James. A brief outline of each thinker's view on the make-up of the universe may provide the best answer.

While Pratt individuated the world into an infinitude of particles, Emerson blended everything into a great sea of idea or Mind. Each particle, for Pratt, possesses mind and will, and through choice, they seek to connect with each other and thus become one in intelligence and power. Pratt proposed that spirits are made "perfectly ONE in all their attributes and qualities; but not one in substance, for this would be impossible; each particle, though organized, maintains its own identity in the system." Emerson, in contrast, proposed that individual minds can connect with the transcendent Mind, a connection that allows the Over-Soul to direct the enlightened individual's existence, or perhaps more accurately, the will of the individual merges with that of the Divine Mind. In both Pratt's and Emerson's view, individual minds are instructed, but for Pratt the instruction occurs between ontological equals, though hierarchically arranged, while for Emerson it is transmitted from a superior source to lower minds. In each instance, the individual minds possess the capacity to achieve godlike knowledge, though with Emerson, ontological differences may still exist after such instruction. Though the kinds of individuals James conceived differ ontologically from Emerson's and Pratt's minds, they relate to one another on existentially equal grounds, as with Pratt's intelligent matter.²⁴

James founded his epistemological approach to God in the empirically radical worldview he helped define, and consequently, for him, any God that might exist must possess the intellectual and ontological attributes he observed in human experience. For James, as he stated in his postscript to *Varieties of Religious Experience*, God "might conceivably even be only a larger and more godlike self, of which the present self would then be but the mutilated expression, and the universe might conceivably be a collection of such selves, of different degrees of inclusiveness, with no absolute unity realized in it at all." James entertained the notion that selves, some mutilated and some godlike, co-exist, which, through co-consciousness, achieve intellectual unity, while maintaining existential distinction. Like Pratt, James democratized the universe by proposing ontological similarity between God and the world. Thus, while the God(s) Pratt, Emerson, and James proposed possess distinctive natures, a comparison of the relationship between their God(s) and other entities in the universe highlights the most profound differences and similarities.²⁵

24. Pratt, "The Pre-Existence of Man" in *The Seer* 1, no. 7 (July 1853), 104.

25. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 468.

Pratt's, Emerson's, and James's theological explanations range from sure knowledge to uncertain speculation. The thought of each particular thinker varies greatly and their writings about deity contain significant differences which elucidate their specific views and thoughts. Pratt's neo-absolutist claims about the Holy Spirit sit between Emerson's absolutist conceptions of the Divine Mind and James's finitistic speculations about God. By tracing through the seeming similarities that surface in early analysis, it becomes clear that isolated words often belie meaning, and only ideational context allows for effective comparative analysis. In an imaginary meeting between Pratt, Emerson, and James, perhaps in a conference on panentheism, none would find precise ideological similarity in the others. Pratt would perhaps condemn Emerson as an atheist, Emerson would probably dismiss James's finite God, and James would most likely denounce Pratt's perfect Gods as "metaphysical monsters."

Counterfactuals aside, fashioning comparisons between Pratt's theology and the respective views of Emerson and James clarifies each thinker's ideas, illuminates their respective positions within a wider ideational context, and cautions scholars against isolating thought in an attempt to claim intellectual sameness. Each of these intellectuals often presented their ideas in relation to other concepts, which at times helped them clarify their meaning. These comparisons also highlight each thinker's position within a particular intellectual context. Pratt, Emerson, and James all advanced panentheistic notions, but an examination of their writings evidences the various possibilities that exist among individuals who espouse views within a panentheistic tradition. Similarly, the distinctiveness of thought revealed in comparing these American intellectuals shows the danger involved in piecing together similarities to create a useful argument about intellectual cohesion. While this paper has attempted to provide enough evidence to highlight the crucial distinctions amidst possible similarities, perhaps it simply exemplifies the very criticism I raise against comparative and intellectual history. ☈

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Prolegomena to Any Future Study of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon

Joseph M. Spencer

WHAT I INTEND TO SHOW in the course of this paper is, in a word, that making sense of Isaiah’s place in the Book of Mormon is the essential key to making sense of the Book of Mormon as such. Whether the Book of Mormon is approached as an ancient book of inspired scripture (as it is by most believers) or whether the Book of Mormon is approached as a nineteenth-century artifact (inspired or otherwise), what it *is* or *does* or *enacts* cannot be grasped without close attention to the role played in it by the writings of Isaiah. Thus, what follows is an outline of a kind of “program” for the study of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon—a program intended both to lay the foundation for further study of Isaiah’s role in the book and to begin to clarify the status and the stakes of the Book of Mormon’s self-presentation.

Clearing the Ground

In order even to begin to outline such a program, it is necessary first to critique—in order to be definitively done with—two misguided approaches to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon. The first of these regards

Isaiah's presence in the Book of Mormon as effectively accidental, while the second regards Isaiah's presence in the book as essential, but for accidental reasons. Each deserves close attention.

The Accidental Isaiah

The first problematic approach assumes from the outset that the presence in the Book of Mormon of large swaths of Isaiah's writings is strictly unnecessary. Such an assumption generally takes one of two forms: either one assumes that the ancient historical person Nephi had a kind of unjustified fetish for an obscure Old Testament figure that led him to include confusing material that is, in the last analysis, irrelevant to the modern reader¹; or one assumes, as did Fawn Brodie, that whenever the "literary reservoir" of Joseph Smith, author of the book, "ran dry, ... he simply arranged for his Nephite prophets to quote from the Bible."² Whether deriving from the confrontation of a believer with the unfortunate "Isaiah barrier," or whether deriving from the task the unbeliever has of explaining the thoughtless work of the author of a less-than-aesthetically-pleasing book of scripture, the assumption that Isaiah is accidental to the Book of Mormon has been prevalent.

What, then, is wrong with this prevalent approach? Simply that it begs the question. That is, it assumes without argumentation that nothing of significance is at work in the Book of Mormon's employment of Isaiah. Study of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is foreclosed in advance and without explanation. In the end, it is perhaps better not to call this first approach an *approach*. Really, it simply leaves Isaiah alone. Something at least more interesting is obviously called for.

1. This assumption is ultimately what lies behind the flood of publications aimed at helping Latter-day Saints "make it through the Isaiah chapters." Just from the past decade or so, see Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding Isaiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998); Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); John Bytheway, *Isaiah for Airheads* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006); Terry Ball and Nathan Winn, *Making Sense of Isaiah: Insights and Modern Applications* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009); and David J. Ridges, *Isaiah Made Easier in the Bible and the Book of Mormon* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2009).

2. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), 58.

The Accidentally Essential Isaiah

Seemingly opposed to this first (non-)approach's unwillingness to engage with Isaiah in the Book of Mormon is the critical regard of a second approach, an approach that ultimately roots itself in concern for (or in the desire to argue against) the historicity of the Book of Mormon. This approach came to the attention of Latter-day Saints generally in 1939 when Sidney Sperry published his scholarly analysis, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," in the Church's periodical, *The Improvement Era*.³ After summarizing the modern critical conviction that the Book of Isaiah should be divided up into the work of (at least) three distinct authors working in (at least) three distinct historical periods, Sperry describes the "Isaiah problem" in the following terms: "If the critics are right the Book of Mormon quotes extensive portions of the sayings of unknown prophets who lived sixty years or more after the Nephites were supposed to have left Jerusalem, and mistakenly attributes them to Isaiah."

As with the first problematic approach to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon, this approach takes two distinct shapes. On the one hand, believers interested in the Isaiah problem have found themselves with the task either of arguing against what Christopher Seitz has appropriately called "the greatest historical-critical consensus of the modern period" by asserting the authorial unity of the Book of Isaiah (this was Sperry's own approach),⁴ or of trying to establish the possibility that the bits and pieces of Isaiah that apparently should not appear in the Book of Mormon could have been written by disciples of Isaiah before the Babylonian exile.⁵ On the other hand, critics interested in the Isaiah problem have occupied

3. Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 42 (1939): 524–525, 564–569, 594, 634, 636–637. Versions of this same original paper appear in almost all of Sperry's later books on the Book of Mormon.

4. Christopher R. Seitz, "Introduction: The One Isaiah // The Three Isaiahs," in Christopher R. Seitz, ed., *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 14. Note Grant Hardy's comment that Sperry-like responses to the Isaiah problem would today be but "an inadequate (and inaccurate) response to a significant body of detailed historical and literary analysis." Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 69.

5. See, for example, William J. Hamblin, "'Isaiah Update' Challenged," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 4–7; and John W. Welch, "Authorship of the Book of Isaiah in Light of the Book of Mormon," in Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch, eds., *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 423–437.

themselves with drawing on the scholarly consensus concerning Isaiah in order to clinch their case against the Book of Mormon's historicity.⁶ In this second approach, then—whether employed *for* or *against* the historicity of the Book of Mormon—Isaiah's presence in the Book of Mormon is regarded as essential, but as essential only to establishing or demolishing the book's historicity. Its essentiality is, in the end, only accidental; it is not essential to the book *itself*, to the book's *self-presentation*, but to questions ultimately foreign to the book.

So what is wrong with this second approach to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon? Simply that it only *appears* to pay attention to the place of Isaiah in the book. It unquestionably grants Isaiah a privileged position in the work of making sense of the Book of Mormon, but it determines in advance that there is only one question to ask about the book, namely, whether it is historical or not. It does not ask about, but instead assumes, that the Book of Mormon principally presents itself as an irremediably historical book. But such insistence on enclosing the Book of Mormon in a debate about its historicity can be—should be—criticized. Whether or not the book is historical, it does things with Isaiah that deserve close attention, things that any exclusive focus on the question of historicity will likely never get around to addressing. The question of historicity is unquestionably important, but it is only *one* question, and it should not be allowed to distract readers from other, perhaps more crucial questions.

Towards the Essential Isaiah

It is important, I believe, that each of these first two approaches to Isaiah in the Book of Mormon takes two distinct shapes. One can assume Isaiah to be accidental to the Book of Mormon as a believer *or* as a critic, and one can regard Isaiah as essential to the accidental question of the book's historicity from the position of a believer *or* of a critic. The same is true of the approach I hope to spell out in the remainder of this paper: One can assert Isaiah's essentiality to the Book of Mormon as a believer *or* as a critic. But there is nonetheless a crucial difference between this third approach and the two approaches I have here criticized. In the two foregoing approaches, the believer and the critic cannot agree on the significance of Isaiah to the Book of Mormon. This is especially clear in the second approach, where the believer takes Isaiah to be central to the be-

6. See, for instance, George D. Smith, "Isaiah Updated," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 113–130.

lief that the Book of Mormon is historical and the critic takes Isaiah to be central to the recognition that the Book of Mormon is *not* historical.

In the third approach I will now outline, on the other hand, it seems to me that the critic and the believer can agree on the significance of Isaiah's presence in the Book of Mormon. Whether that significance was created through the work of ancient prophets or through the work of a modern mythmaker, the significance itself can be agreed upon. In what follows, I therefore attempt to use language that is, in terms of the question of believer-versus-critic, essentially neutral. Though I have my own convictions concerning the book, I want here to bracket them in the name of making sense of what the Book of Mormon is, does, and enacts.

All that said, then, what does the essential Isaiah look like?⁷

Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: An Outline

The Book of Mormon is clearly a narrative. And it unquestionably moves from its beginnings towards the culminating visit of the Christ to the New World six centuries later in Third Nephi. So far, though, the way the words of the visiting Christ in Third Nephi provide a remarkably illuminating retroactive interpretation of the whole Nephite narrative has been entirely overlooked.

This retroactive interpretation first begins to emerge after all those present at Christ's appearing have had the opportunity to feel his hands and feet, at the point when Christ turns his attention to baptism. After authorizing twelve men to perform the rite, he offers a crucial, stern rebuke concerning what he describes as a double Nephite controversy. First, Christ asserts that there had been, previous to his visit, consistent debate about the specifics of the rite's performance (see 3 Nephi 11:22–28). Second, he makes clear that there had also been ongoing debate about the specifics of what might loosely be called Trinitarian theology (see 3 Nephi 11:28–41). Close reading of the text suggests, moreover, that the two debates are to be understood as closely connected: The debate over ritual performance appears to have been rooted in the debate over the triune nature of God—specifically, over whether the individual should be baptized in the name of Christ alone, or whether she should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Though these de-

7. The arguments I will present in what follows are drawn from my findings worked out in the course of researching my book on conceptions of typology in the Book of Mormon: Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament* (Salem, Oregon: Salt Press, 2011).

bates have been largely ignored by readers of the Book of Mormon,⁸ their importance for making sense of the larger Nephite narrative cannot be overstated.

In fact it is not difficult to guess to what Christ is meant to be referring. In the larger narrative that precedes Third Nephi, one finds two drastically distinct accounts of the triune nature of God, each closely associated with what are clearly distinct baptismal traditions. The first of these is to be found in the so-called small plates of Nephi. There, in what is now 2 Nephi 31, the reader finds Nephi laying out an account of the relationships among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost that is in striking accord with what Christ himself is described as presenting in 3 Nephi 11. And, importantly, this small-plates account of God's nature is intertwined in 2 Nephi 31 with a detailed explanation of the meaning of baptism. The second and clearly distinct account is to be found later, in the middle of the great speech of the martyr Abinadi before the court of King Noah. There, in what is now Mosiah 15, Abinadi provides an explanation of the Godhead that still confuses many Latter-day Saint readers.⁹ And, as with Nephi, this theological presentation is coupled in the text with an explanation of baptism: The narrative that follows Abinadi's speech and subsequent martyrdom describes how Alma, Abinadi's only convert, goes on to found a baptismal tradition distinct from Nephi's, and in direct fidelity to Abinadi's teachings.

The differences between Nephi's and Abinadi's accounts of baptism have been noticed,¹⁰ but their significance has been generally overlooked. Though nothing is said in the narratives before Third Nephi to indicate that there was debate about whether the Nephite or Abinadite approach to baptism and the nature of God was the true one, the words of Christ in Third Nephi are clearly meant to indicate that there had been such debate, that the Nephites had seen the two traditions as being essentially ir-

8. None of the standard commentaries available on the Book of Mormon attempts to identify the nature of the disputations to which Christ refers. Especially interesting are those commentaries that specifically warn against any attempt to identify the disputations. See Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987–1992), 4:57; and Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:346.

9. It is an explanation that can be reconciled with Nephi and Christ—and Joseph Smith!—only through rather tortured hermeneutical acrobatics.

10. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 3:327–328: “Alma’s baptism … differs from Nephi’s.” Cf. also 2:433–436.

reconcilable. Importantly, other differences can be detected between the theological interests and emphases of the small plates and those of the Nephites associated with the Abinadite tradition. While Nephi's small plates, for example, focus almost exclusively on the importance of Israel and its covenant, thus being attuned to eschatological concerns and interested in texts drawn from the Hebrew Bible (see especially 1 Nephi 11–15, 19–22; 2 Nephi 3, 6–8, 10, 12–30), the leaders of the Abinadite church are almost never portrayed as paying attention to such themes, instead being focused almost exclusively on formulating a systematic theology of atonement (see especially Mosiah 11–18; Alma 5–15; 31–34; 36–42; Helaman 13–15).

From all this it appears that the Book of Mormon is—on its own account—stretched across three narrative hinges: (1) Nephi's production of the small plates; (2) Abinadi's theologically innovative speech before Noah's court; and (3) the epoch-ending visit of Christ to the New World. But what has all this to do with Isaiah? Quite simply, this: At each of the historical hinges of the Book of Mormon is to be found an explicit thematization of Isaiah—in fact, a systematically presented exposition of how to interpret the writings of Isaiah. The two books of Nephi in the small plates are explicitly structured so as to privilege the writings—and the interpretation of the writings—of Isaiah, and in a very particular way; Abinadi's prophetic intervention is explicitly presented as a response to a demand to interpret Isaiah, in the course of which response a distinctive approach to Isaiah is formulated; and the visiting Christ of Third Nephi brings his sermonizing to a close by marking an unmistakable return to Isaiah, coupling it also with the outline of an interpretive methodology. Obviously, it is to these three moments in Nephite history that one must pay attention in order to make sense of Isaiah's place in the Book of Mormon.

What follows, then, is a series of preliminary analyses of the role Isaiah plays in each of these three crucial moments in the Nephite narrative. For reasons that will become clear, the bulk of attention is given to the place of Isaiah in the small plates. These three analyses will be followed by a few general conclusions.

Nephi and Isaiah

As any first-time reader of the Book of Mormon immediately notes, it is the two books of Nephi that first and foremost dedicate themselves to appropriating Isaiah. In addition to the so-called “Isaiah chapters” of 2 Nephi 12–24 (the whole of Isaiah 2–14 in one lengthy quotation), one

finds in Nephi's small plates quotations of and commentary on Isaiah 29 (2 Nephi 26–27) and Isaiah 48–51 (1 Nephi 19–22 and 2 Nephi 6–8, 10). These additional Isaianic texts deserve quite as much attention as the “barrier” of Isaiah in 2 Nephi 12–24. But how are these several quotations distributed among the several parts of Nephi's record? Is there a discernible structure in that record that helps to make sense of what Isaiah is doing there?

There is, in the end, a structure to First and Second Nephi, and one that *should* not be missed. It is no mostly invisible chiastic structure. Rather it is something that the record itself explicitly identifies in a passage generally skimmed over (1 Nephi 19:1–6). This structure has been preliminarily outlined by Frederick Axelgard in a largely ignored study.¹¹ As Axelgard shows, there is a definite line drawn between what the text refers to as the “more sacred things,” the privileged essential core of Nephi's record (the twenty-five chapters stretching from 2 Nephi 6 to 2 Nephi 30), and the merely “sacred” remainder of the record.¹² Importantly, the thus privileged “more sacred things” consist of what the record describes as the words of three witnesses: (1) Nephi's brother Jacob, who quotes and comments on Isaiah 50–51 (and a few verses from Isaiah 49), (2) Isaiah, in the shape of the “Isaiah chapters,” and (3) Nephi himself, whose contribution is systematically built on an appropriation of Isaiah 29 (and a few other scattered references to Isaianic texts). That Isaiah is sandwiched between the other two witnesses appears to be intentional, since they both consistently and explicitly defer to Isaiah. From the beginning to the end of the “more sacred things,” explicitly structurally privileged in the small plates, Isaiah is the star of the show.

From these details, it becomes clear that the inclusion of long quotations from Isaiah in the small plates is not only deliberate, but actually the focus of all the editorial energies that went into producing the record. The meaning of Isaiah's prophecies is undoubtedly meant to be the key to the meaning of the small plates. To ignore Isaiah in this record is, in the end, to ignore the record as such. But what happens in these structurally privileged chapters dealing with Isaiah? And what happens in those quotations of Isaiah that appear elsewhere in the small plates, particularly in

11. See Frederick W. Axelgard, “1 and 2 Nephi: An Inspiring Whole,” *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (Fall 1986): 53–66.

12. Axelgard actually fails to recognize that this “more sacred things” come to a close with 2 Nephi 30 (he includes in them 2 Nephi 31–33). For reasons I will not review here, it is best to understand 2 Nephi 31–33 as a supplement to the “more sacred things.”

the last chapters of First Nephi?

The first mention of Isaiah in the record comes in 1 Nephi 15:20, a brief narrative note in which the text explains that Nephi employed the writings of Isaiah to teach his brothers about “the restoration of the Jews, or of the house of Israel.” Though this is a passing reference, it lays out the basic intentions that seem always to accompany the employment of Isaiah in the small plates: to make sense of the larger covenantal history of Israel. This first, passing reference is then expanded in great detail in the last chapters of First Nephi (1 Nephi 19–22), where the actual words of Isaiah are introduced into the record for the first time (1 Nephi 20–21 quote Isaiah 48–49 in full) and expounded at length (in a somewhat disjointed, preliminary way in 1 Nephi 19, and then in an almost systematic way in 1 Nephi 22). Here again, the emphasis on the Israelite covenant is unmistakable, and the will to interpret Isaiah as having provided a kind of template for making sense of covenantal history—past and future—is modeled. Moreover, the text has Nephi give a (much misappropriated) name to this approach to Isaiah at this point: *likening*.

If these appropriations of Isaiah in First Nephi introduce (and name) the method, they only set the stage for the “more sacred things” that make up the bulk of Second Nephi. There, in the chapters whose centrality I have already identified, the same interpretive method is employed again. In 2 Nephi 6–10 (Jacob’s part in the “more sacred things”), the connection between the Second Nephi and First Nephi appropriations of Isaiah is explicit: Jacob’s words open with an explanation that his focus on Isaiah has been guided by his brother, and his teachings open with exposition of some of the verses that appear in Nephi’s discussion of Isaiah in 1 Nephi 19–22. The text thus presents Jacob’s sermon in 2 Nephi 6–10 as a kind of updating for a now-established Nephite community of Nephi’s earlier words delivered to his now-estranged brothers in 1 Nephi 19–22.

Through to the end of Jacob’s words concerning Isaiah, there is a consistent and unmistakable program guiding the inclusion of Isaiah’s writings in the small plates. The focus is on a string of chapters, unmistakably in the canonical order known from the Christian Bible, drawn collectively from Second Isaiah’s prophecies regarding the “new exodus” from Babylon and the subsequent return to the promised land (Isaiah 48–49, and then Isaiah 50–51). But then there is a sudden shift in 2 Nephi 11. As the record turns from Jacob’s sermon directly to the writings of Isaiah (Isaiah 2–24)—quoted without manipulation or even commentary—First Isaiah replaces Second Isaiah, marking a shift from prophecies concerning a new, essentially eschatological exodus to prophecies principally

associated with the Assyrian threat in the eighth century before Christ. This shift deserves close attention.

The shift is confirmed in the chapters that follow the quotation of Isaiah 2–14, where the text presents, as part of Nephi's own prophecies, a strikingly creative Nephitzing of another text from First Isaiah: Isaiah 29 (in 2 Nephi 26–27). This further foray not only confirms the record's interest in First Isaiah; it also clarifies the focus on, specifically, Isaiah 2–14. The strong ties between Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 6–8, often noted by commentators, are certainly crucial to the small plates interest in Isaiah, something made especially clear by the particular aspects of Isaiah 29 to which 2 Nephi 26–27 gives the most sustained attention. What seems to drive the record's interest in these particular chapters of First Isaiah is their singular focus on what has long been called Isaiah's “turn to the future.”¹³ Faced with the fact, according to Isaiah 6, that his contemporaries would completely reject his message, Isaiah develops especially in Isaiah 7–8 a theology of the “hidden God,” of a God whose work would be understood only by a future generation. The key moment of this development, for the small plates, would seem to be Isaiah 8:16–20 (the crucial elements of which text are repeated in Isaiah 29): that point at which rejection in the present and hope for the future led Isaiah to “seal up” his writings for a generation still to come. The Book of Mormon presents Nephi as being deeply interested in this Isaianic theme, something that makes good sense given that Nephi's prophetic career is described as having been launched by an apocalyptic vision of the latter-day emergence of a book (clearly to be understood as the Book of Mormon itself) that would shatter longstanding inattention to covenantal Israel.

Thus, rather late in Second Nephi, a kind of shift in emphasis as regards the use of Isaiah can be witnessed. Where First Nephi and the first ten chapters of Second Nephi exclusively quote from Second Isaiah in order to give prophetic shape to the idea that Israel will experience an eschatological exodus in the distant future, most of Second Nephi focuses instead on the writings of First Isaiah in order to exploit the Isaianic motif of a prophetic text written in an earlier, apostate period for a later, prepared period. But it is possible to suggest that this shift from Second to First Isaiah is less radical than it at first appears. Studies of Isaiah published since the 1970s, consistently emphasizing the (redactional, not authorial) unity of the book of Isaiah, have seen important, apparently

13. The best theological exposition of this is to be found in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 2:151–155.

intentional theological connections between First and Second Isaiah. Among such studies, of particular interest to the interpretation of Isaiah in the small plates is the work of Edgar Conrad.¹⁴

On Conrad's interpretation—anchored in a heavy emphasis on Isaiah 6–8 and Isaiah 29—Second Isaiah was originally written as if it were a “reading,” by the coming generation projected in First Isaiah, of the sealed book written by First Isaiah. If the author/editor of the small plates, heavily emphasizing the same texts from First Isaiah, was working with a similar interpretation of the relationship between First and Second Isaiah, it would be possible to suggest that deep connections tie the small plates interest first in Second Isaiah and then in First Isaiah. Certainly, at any rate, Nephi's record anticipates a connection between the eventual emergence of a covenantal book projected by First Isaiah and the eschatological re-gathering of Israel outlined by Second Isaiah. It is perhaps best to suggest that whoever put First and Second Nephi together saw a complex promise-and-fulfillment relationship as weaving together First and Second Isaiah.

In the end, this close bond between First and Second Isaiah—the one “book” putting together the sealed text, the other “book” finally opening and responding to that text—seems to be essential to the small plates. Moreover, such a bond, because it is specifically a bond between *texts*, is what interpreters of scripture call typology. Indeed, it has long been asserted that it is precisely Isaiah 6–8 that marks the *origin* of the idea of typology in the biblical tradition. And, interestingly, the small plates record of Nephi has important things to say about typology, principally in 2 Nephi 11, just before the “Isaiah chapters.” (The text, significantly, returns to the theme of typology, though without using the actual term, in 2 Nephi 25, immediately after the “Isaiah chapters”). The possibility must therefore, it seems, be countenanced that the understanding of typology presented in the small plates is to be understood as having been drawn from (a very carefully read) Isaiah. That the discussion of typology in 2 Nephi 11 (as that in 2 Nephi 25) is associated with the Law (of Moses) only makes this clearer: What is to be sealed up in Isaiah 8 is specifically called “the law.”¹⁵

It is only after all of this carefully structured and complexly nuanced

14. See Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

15. Brevard Childs points out the possibility that references to “the law” in Isaiah, while not having had reference to the Mosaic code in their original settings, should be interpreted in that way in their larger, canonical settings. See Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 30.

appropriation of Isaiah that Second Nephi turns, in its thirty-first chapter, to the double question of baptism and the triune nature of God. Significantly, though, it is not only with Nephi's approach to baptism and Godhead that Abinadi will disagree; Abinadi's speech is also at odds with what Nephi has to say about Isaiah, as well as what he seems to understand by typology (drawn, apparently, from Isaiah's own writings). Thus if a controversy emerges in the wake of Abinadi's speech before Noah's court, the small plates are what sets up—in advance—the stakes of that controversy, and those stakes are largely borrowed from Isaiah.

Abinadi and Isaiah

The small plates after Nephi—in the shorter books of Jacob, Enos, Jarom, and Omni—have little to say about either Nephite history or Nephite preaching. It is only in the last of these books that one finds recorded any event of larger narrative importance, but what is recorded there in Omni is narratively crucial for making sense of the Nephite theological controversies to which the Christ of Third Nephi refers.

The book of Omni records the end of the Nephites' centuries-old establishment in the land of Nephi, the settlement of which is first recorded in 2 Nephi 5. In the midst of prophetic warnings about imminent destruction—apparently at the hands of invading Lamanites—a certain Mosiah leads a small group of followers to settle in safer territories. Arriving in the valley of Zarahemla, they find a settlement of people with whom they soon unite, with Mosiah somewhat precariously positioned as the king over the unified people. The book of Omni, the transitional “Words of Mormon,” and the first chapters of the non-small-plates book of Mosiah then describe the process of stabilization, coming to fruition with the sermon of King Benjamin, who is described as finally fully uniting the people by replacing cultural and political differences with a shared commitment to Christian faith. Before complete stabilization is realized in the first chapters of Mosiah, however, the text mentions that a significant group of Benjamin’s subjects begin a campaign to return to their former lands in Nephi, now occupied by their Lamanite enemies. As one learns only later in the book of Mosiah, the group—despite some difficulties—eventually achieves its aim, establishing a Nephite colony in the heart of Lamanite territory, a colony that immediately loses contact with the larger Nephite contingency in Zarahemla. All these narrative complications turn out to be crucial: It is to this cut-off colony, established in the formerly lost lands of the Nephites’ “first inheritance,” that Abinadi eventually comes to deliver his prophetic message.

The plot of the narrative thickens when the reader encounters subtle but crucial hints in Mosiah 9–10 that the Nephite return to the land of Nephi was—particularly after it was secured by several miraculous military victories—interpreted by the colony’s inhabitants as a kind of return to Nephite beginnings, a kind of re-establishment of the golden era of Nephi’s original reign in that very land.¹⁶ Even more significantly, the ensuing narrative, beginning in Mosiah 11, sets up a strong—and apparently intentional—parallel between the aftermath of the *re*-establishment in Nephi and the aftermath of the *original* establishment in the same land. Just as Nephi’s celebrated reign is followed in the book of Jacob by a period of licentiousness and materialism, so the death of the first king of the newly founded Nephite colony in the land of Nephi gives way to sexual and economic decadence. With the rise in the colony of the wicked King Noah, things in Nephi fall apart according to a pattern recorded in the small plates.

It is against this period of spiritual malaise that Abinadi prophetically rages (as a kind of reembodiment of the figure of Jacob, brother of Nephi). But, according to the narrative, Abinadi gets little chance to deliver his message: He is summarily arrested and brought before Noah’s court. But it is in Noah’s court rather than out among the people that Abinadi shines, so to speak. Faced with a group of priests who have questions for him to answer regarding, of all things, the meaning of a passage from Isaiah, Abinadi is forced to make of his defense an intervention on how to interpret the prophet consistently privileged in the small plates (see Mosiah 12:19–24). A little reading between the lines allows one to make clear sense of the motives behind the priests’ questions concerning Isaiah. The best explanation is that the decadent establishment in Nephi has come to use Isaiah to provide itself with the ideological justification necessary to defend its sinfulness and sloth. That is, according to an argument that cannot be presented in any detail here, the text presents the Nephi establishment as having claimed that with the return to the land of Nephi—duly interpreted as a return to the primordial age of Nephi’s original reign—the eschaton projected by (Second) Isaiah had already been experienced, such that history, and with it the normativity of the Mosaic Law itself, had come to an irreversible end.

What absolutely must not be missed here is a delicate and subtle but infinitely crucial detail: As Abinadi’s speech helps to make clear, the

16. Mosiah 9–10 are presented in the text as a first-person account written by the first king of the Nephite colony. See Grant Hardy’s rich discussion in Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 123–132.

reader is meant to understand that Noah's regime, by tying their ideological self-justification to a likening of Second Isaiah, believed itself to be following out the project outlined by Nephi in the small plates. With this in mind, it seems best to understand the question put to Abinadi concerning Isaiah to be, in its narrative context, meant as a challenge to Abinadi not only to defend his politically subversive prophetic activities, but also to explain his refusal to follow the by-then established understanding of the small plates project.

Abinadi does not disappoint. Indeed, as the narrative of his speech unfolds, he is portrayed as effectively forging an interpretive approach to Isaiah that radically breaks with the one attributed to Nephi in the small plates. In effect, Abinadi replaces Nephi's interest in Isaianic covenantal theology with an explicit and unmistakable Christological approach. Though Nephi is portrayed as having given himself almost exclusively to the way Isaiah's writings frame the history of Israel's covenant—the apostate present (First Isaiah) as much as the eschatological future (Second Isaiah)—Abinadi is portrayed as taking Isaiah to have been speaking in straightforward terms only of the coming of Christ (and that in enough detail even to lay out particular aspects of his life!). Thus, while Nephi fixes his attention most closely on Isaiah 6–8, Isaiah 29, and Isaiah 48–51—texts in which Christological (or even generally messianic) elements are difficult to find—Abinadi is riveted to Isaiah 53, the Christological interpretation of which is second nature to the Christian reader of the Old Testament. Tying the prophecy of Isaiah to the life of Christ—and to that alone—Abinadi is portrayed as making a radical break with the small plates way of making sense of Isaiah.

Strikingly, the narrator telling the story of Abinadi seems to be attuned to the difficulty Abinadi's break with the small plates might imply. At the very moment in the story when Abinadi uproots the interpretive methodology associated with Nephi, the narrator leaves off direct quotation of Abinadi in order to draw a connection between the story of Abinadi and the narrative of Exodus 32–34—the story of Moses' breaking the stone tables because of the idolatry perpetrated by Israel during his absence. The point of this narrative move seems clear: Abinadi, faced with the idolatry of the Nephite colony, effectively breaks the small plates and their theological intentions, putting in their place a rather different theological project.

Crucially, the narrative goes on to explain that Abinadi's speech did not fall entirely on deaf ears. His one convert, Alma, escapes from Noah's grasp and goes on to found, in the borders of the land, a full ecclesiastical organization, a church that, once it finds its way to the land of Zara-

hemla, ends up displacing the kingdom so carefully stabilized by King Benjamin. The text clearly places the launching of this new ecclesiastical tradition in direct fidelity to Abinadi's speech, and that tradition continues to form the heart of Nephite—and eventually Lamanite—religious experience all the way through the following narrative books up to the visit of Christ in Third Nephi. And, as if to make quite clear that Abinadi's message regarding Isaiah was heard loud and clear by Alma and the church he established, Isaiah's writings disappear *entirely* after Abinadi's speech. Taking up the Abinadite Christological approach to Isaiah, the church—the reader is meant to assume—quickly lost interest in the anything-but-plain words of the Old World prophet, since their own Nephite prophecies concerning the coming of Christ were much clearer. As a consequence, from Abinadi until the visit of Christ, there is not a word about Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.

The Abinadite break with the small plates, it seems, is complete. And the controversy between two rivalrous traditions—each with its distinct theological emphases, its different ways of relating to Old World scripture, and its unique understandings of baptism and the nature of God—is completely set in motion, though only one of them gets privileged in the Book of Mormon narrative.

Christ and Isaiah

If nothing about Isaiah appears between Abinadi's speech in Mosiah and the appearance of Christ in Third Nephi, much of significance about Isaiah appears on the lips of the visiting Christ. Indeed, the entirety of Christ's two-day speech—beginning especially with 3 Nephi 15—is ostensibly a commentary on the very verses Noah's priests ask Abinadi to interpret (Isaiah 52:7–10). Still more significantly, Christ is portrayed in Third Nephi as interpreting those verses in a fashion entirely distinct from Abinadi. Speaking in broad terms, while Abinadi couples the passage in question with Isaiah 53 in order to present a Christological hermeneutic, Christ couples it with Isaiah 54, thereby placing the Israelite covenant again at the heart of Isaianic interpretation. Moreover, immediately after quoting Isaiah 54 at length, Christ is presented as intentionally bringing the long silence concerning Isaiah to a definitive end, commanding his hearers in the New World to “search … the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1).

This return to the small plates approach to (and interest in) Isaiah is rich in implications. Not only does it mark what can only be interpreted as a direct intervention on the question of Isaiah interpretation, it also

seems to provide the beginnings of an explanation for what the Book of Mormon intends to have its readers understand by Christ's introduction of a new baptismal tradition, his departure from the Abinadite tradition that had obtained for fully two centuries before his visit. And it thus begins to explain the meaning of Christ's references to disputations and controversies. Any baptismal and/or theological tradition subtracted from or ignorant of the covenantal context worked out in nuance and detail in the small plates must be replaced with a tradition anchored in (Isaiah's) exposition of the theological and historical significance of the covenant.

Of course, the visiting Christ of Third Nephi has a lot to say about the particulars of Isaiah interpretation as well. Particularly interesting is the way that Third Nephi weaves the writings of both Micah and Malachi into bits and pieces of Isaiah 52. And the curious way that Christ is depicted as quoting certain prophecies of Isaiah and Micah twice, the second time replacing references to the Lord with references to the Father, deserves close interpretive attention. Indeed, though Christ in Third Nephi has far less to say than Nephi in the small plates about Isaiah, the employment of Isaiah in the account of the visiting Christ perhaps deserves the closest attention of all. For the purposes of this essay, however, the outline thus far provided will have to suffice.

Conclusion

In the course of this essay, I believe I have presented a basic—a very basic—outline of what Isaiah seems to be doing in the Book of Mormon. And because Isaiah clearly plays a central role in the Book of Mormon's self-presentation—especially in the shape the Book of Mormon gives to its own projected emergence—it seems to me clear that study of the Book of Mormon, whether focused on the nineteenth century or on the ancient Americas, must anchor itself in careful study of how the book appropriates the writings of Isaiah. If, as Richard Bushman has claimed, the Book of Mormon "gave to the word *restoration* its peculiar Mormon flavor,"¹⁷ or if, as Jan Shipps has claimed, the Book of Mormon "effected," for Latter-day Saints, "a break in the very fabric of history,"¹⁸ it is high time the book—in all its narrative/structural complexity and in all its

17. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 76.

18. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 52.

theological innovation—received some attention. It may not be a work of art, but it is nonetheless a marvelous work, and something to wonder—deeply—about. ☈

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